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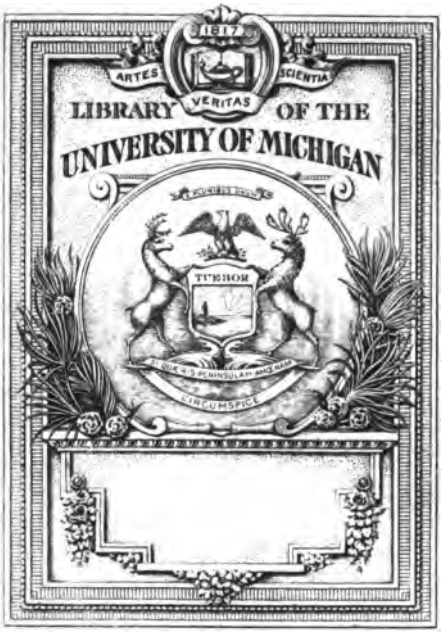
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A

FREE INQUIRY

INTO THE

NATURE AND ORIGIN

OF

EVIL.

IN SIX LETTERS TO ———.

With an additional Preface, and ſome Explanatory Notes.

English
Reading
11-18-30
22709

PREFACE.

THE author of the following letters is too well acquainted with human nature to be in the leaſt ſurpriſed at the reception they have met with; that is, that they have been much liked, much cenſured, and little aſſented to: Truth, he knows, has at all times been ſo received; for though by her native beauty ſhe is ſure to charm, yet from her repugnancy to moſt men's intereſts, ſhe is ſeldom welcome: politicians are afraid of her, parties deteſt her, and all profeſſions agree that ſhe is mad, and very dangerous if ſuffered to go about in public: he knows that mankind live all in maſquerade, and that whoever preſumes to come amongſt them barefaced muſt expect to be abuſed by the whole aſſembly: he could therefore have no motive for thus imparting his free ſentiments to the public, except the dictates of his own heart,

which tell him, that it is every man's duty, who comes into the world, to uſe his beſt endeavours, however inſignificant, to leave it as much wiſer, and as much better as he can. Induced by this motive alone, he at firſt undertook this inquiry; and now, actuated by the ſame principle, and unprovoked by all the ſenſeleſs miſapprehenſions, and malicious miſconſtructions, with which it has been tortured, he will here, with all poſſible conciſeneſs, endeavour to explain thoſe parts of it, which have been ſo miſunderſtood, or miſrepreſented, and give ſatisfaction to all, who are either able or willing to underſtand it.

The firſt letter treats of evils in general, and endeavours to prove, that they all owe their exiſtence, not to any voluntary admiſſion of a benevolent Creator, but to the neceſſity of their own natures, that is, to the impoſſibility of excluding them from any ſyſtem of created Beings whatever; and that in all ſuch ſyſtems, however wiſely contrived, they muſt have, and muſt at all times

times have had a place. Againſt this but one material objection has been urged; which is this, that, in order to make room for this neceſſity of evil, the real exiſtence of a paradiſiacal ſtate is repreſented as at all times impoſſible; and, conſequently, the Moſaic account of that ſtate is utterly exploded, on which the whole fabric of the Chriſtian Religion is erected. How far the literal belief of that account is eſſential to the true faith of a Chriſtian need not be here decided; becauſe not the leaſt mention of it is made in this letter: and therefore this objection is intirely founded on a miſtake. The argument there made uſe of is only this, that ſome have endeavoured to juſtify the goodneſs of God from the introduction of evil, by aſſerting, that at the beginning there was no ſuch thing, but that, at firſt, all creation came out of his omnipotent hand, endued with abſolute perfection, and free from all evil, both natural and moral: to ſhew, that this was an ancient opinion, ſome lines are quoted from Ovid's Metamorphoſes, de-

ſcribing the Golden Age, in ſuch a ſtate of perfect happineſs and innocence; on which the author, thinking them to be no part of any one's creed, imagined himſelf at liberty to obſerve, that from the nature of man, and the nature of this terreſtrial globe, which he inhabits, the real exiſtence of ſuch a ſtate ſeemed impoſſible; and therefore, that theſe deſcriptions of it could be nothing more than amuſing dreams and inchanting fables. This bears not the leaſt reference to the Moſaic account of Paradiſe, in which ſuch a ſtate of abſolute perfection, void of all evil, is ſo far from being deſcribed, that the ſerpent, or the devil, the parent of all evil, is one of the principal characters of that hiſtory; which therefore by no means contradicts the propoſition here aſſerted.

The ſecond letter undertakes to ſhew, that evils of imperfection are in truth no evils at all; but only the abſence of comparative good, reſulting ſolely from the neceſſary inferiority of ſome beings with regard to others, which cannot be prevented in a ſyſ-

tem of creation, whoſe very eſſence conſiſts in a chain of ſubordination, deſcending from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing. To this likewiſe one objection only has been made; which is, that no ſuch chain of ſubordinate beings, reaching from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing, can, in fact, exiſt, for this notable reaſon; becauſe no being can approach next to infinite perfection nor any be contiguous to nothing. But this argument being no more than a quibble on metaphyſical terms, to which no preciſe ideas are affixed, neither deſerves, nor is capable of an anſwer.

The third letter treats of natural evils; and attempts to ſhew, that moſt of theſe, which we complain of, are derived likewiſe from the ſame ſource; that is, from the imperfection of our natures, and our ſtation in the univerſal ſyſtem: to this are added three conjectures; firſt, that many of our miſeries may be owing to ſome ſecret, but invincible diſpoſition, in the nature of things, that renders it impracticable to produce pleaſure excluſive of pain; a certain degree of which

muſt therefore be endured by individuals, for the happineſs and well-being of the whole: ſecondly, that many other of our miſeries may be inflicted on us by the agency of ſuperior beings, to whoſe benefit they may poſſibly be as conducive as the deaths and ſufferings of inferior animals are to ours; and laſtly, that by the ancient doctrine of tranſmigration, the miſeries, which for the ſake of general utility we are obliged to ſuffer in one life, may be recompenſed in another, and ſo the divine goodneſs be ſufficiently juſtified from the admiſſion of them all. To every one of theſe ſome objections have been made: againſt the firſt, it has been alledged, that this impracticability to produce pleaſure without pain, whence ariſes this utility of the ſufferings of individuals for the good of the whole, is merely a production of the author's own daring imagination, founded on no reaſon, and ſupported by no proof. To which he anſwers, that he propoſes it as a conjecture only; but cannot think it ill-founded, ſince it is confirmed

firmed by the appearance of every thing around us, and ſince it is reaſonable to believe, that a benevolent Creator would not have permitted his creatures to have ſuffered on any other terms. In ridicule of the ſecond conjecture, it has been aſked, with an air of humour, whether we can think it credible that ſuperior beings ſhould ride, or hunt, or roaſt, or eat us, as we make uſe of inferior animals? Which queſtion is moſt properly to be anſwered by another: whether, in the unbounded ſyſtem of creation, there may not be numberleſs methods, by which beings of different orders may be ſubſervient to each others uſes, totally above the reach of our comprehenſions? To doubt of which would be like the incredulity of the ignorant peaſant, who can ſcarce be perſuaded to believe that there is any thing in the world, ſome ſpecimen of which he has not beheld within the narrow limits of his own pariſh. To the laſt it is objected, that the doctrine of tranſmigration being only the fanciful and exploded opinion of ſome ancient philoſophers,

phers, in the times of darkneſs, ought not, by the author, to have been here advanced in direct contradiction to the faith and tenets of the Chriſtian religion: to which he replies, that he neither propoſes this doctrine as an article of his own belief, or impoſes it on others; but mentions it only as the moſt rational conjecture of the human mind, uninformed by ſupernatural aſſiſtance, concerning a future ſtate; that it is confirmed by Revelation he does not pretend, but that it directly contradicts it, by no means appears. So ſilent are the ſcriptures concerning the ſtate of the ſoul between death and the reſurrection, that the moſt learned divines ſtill widely differ on that ſubject; ſome maintaining that it enters immediately into a ſtate of retribution; others, of ſleep; and others, of purgation from paſt offences: why therefore is it more repugnant to the ſenſe of theſe writings to ſuppoſe, that it may poſſibly animate other bodies during that period, and, at the laſt day, receive ſuch puniſhments or rewards as is due on the whole account of its

its paſt behaviour? Thus the probability of every one of theſe conjectures ſeems to be ſufficiently eſtabliſhed, and they appear perfectly conſiſtent with reaſon, and not at all contradictory to revelation.

The fourth letter endeavours to account for moral evil: the moſt arduous part of the whole undertaking; to which end it attempts to ſhew, that the common opinion, which derives it ſolely from the abuſe of free-will in man, is ineffectual for that purpoſe; and that therefore, though its very eſſence conſiſts in the production of natural evil, yet it could never have been admitted into the works of a juſt and beneficent Creator, if it had not ſome remote and collateral tendency to univerſal good, by anſwering ſome ends beneficial to the immenſe and incomprehenſible whole; one of which may poſſibly be the converſion of unpreventable miſeries into juſt puniſhments by the production of guilt, without which they muſt have been inflicted on perfect innocence. To this account of the origin of moral evil, not only many weighty

weighty objections have been made, but on it many imputations have been laid of a moſt formidable nature, as that it makes God the cauſe of all wickedneſs, deſtroys free-will in man, and conſequently roots up the foundation of all virtue and morality whatever; and it is, moreover, charged with inconſiſtency and ſelf-contradiction through every part. To all this the author replies only, that he is aſſured, that, if any intelligent reader will peruſe the whole letter together with candor and attention, it will evidently appear that theſe accuſations are entirely groundleſs. He makes no manner of doubt, but that man is endued with free-will, and is juſtly puniſhable for the abuſe of it; and hopes he has ſo expreſſed himſelf, through this whole piece, as to leave no uncertainty of his opinion on that queſtion: all he means is, that though the abuſe of free-will is undoubtedly the immediate cauſe of moral evil, yet it cannot from thence derive its original admiſſion into the works of a benevolent Creator; becauſe man, not being

ing a ſelf-exiſtent and independent being, muſt receive that will itſelf, together with his nature and formation, from the ſupreme author of all things; for which reaſon he cannot apprehend, that the general wickedneſs of mankind can be an accident proceeding from their unforeſeen wrong elections, by which the whole benevolent ſyſtem is defeated; but muſt be a part, and a material part too, of the original plan of creation, wiſely calculated by the incomprehenſible operations of vice and puniſhment, to promote the good and happineſs of the whole. For, to aſſert, that any thing has happened which God did not intend, or that he intended any thing which did not happen, is a language which may be allowed to the poet or the orator, but never to the philoſopher; unleſs we can ſuppoſe, that omniſcience can be diſappointed, and omnipotence defeated. As to inconſiſtency, he denies not the charge; but believes he is not more inconſiſtent than all who have undertaken to write on the ſame ſubject: the

ſcriptures

ſcriptures themſelves are guilty of the ſame ſeeming inconſiſtency on this head; they all repreſent man as a being perfectly free, puniſhable, and puniſhed for his miſbehaviour; yet as conſtantly ſpeak of him as a creature deriving all his thought, will, and diſpoſitions from his Creator, and under his perpetual influence and direction; the appearance of inconſiſtency, in which two propoſitions, both undoubtedly true, proceeds only from our ignorance in the nature and limits of free-will, and divine influence, and our inability to comprehend them. In the latter part of this letter a few hints are flung out, to ſhew that on the principles of the foregoing theory ſome of the moſt abſtruſe doctrines of the chriſtian revelation, of original ſin, grace, predeſtination, and vicarious puniſhment, might be rendered reconcileable to the ſtricteſt reaſon; a propoſal from whence ſurely much advantage might accrue to the cauſe of chriſtianity in general, and by which poſſibly ſome articles of our own church might be proved to be much

leſs

leſs incompatible with common ſenſe than they are thought to be by all thoſe who will not ſubſcribe them, and by many who do: with this, two claſſes of men are particularly offended; the rational diſſenters, as they pleaſe to call themſelves, and the methodiſts: the former of theſe having arbitrarily expunged out of their bibles every thing which appears to them contradictory to reaſon, that is, to their own reaſon, or, in other words, every thing which they cannot underſtand, are diſpleaſed to ſee thoſe tenets explained, which they have thought proper to reject: the latter, having embraced theſe very doctrines only becauſe they appeared unintelligible, are unwilling to ſee them cleared up, and afraid leſt thoſe dark and thorny covers ſhould be laid open, under which they have ſo long ſheltered themſelves from the rays of reaſon: with either of theſe all debate would be vain and uſeleſs; becauſe the firſt, though for the moſt part honeſt, religious, and learned men, are unable to comprehend any reaſoning, which ſoars above

above the limits of their own confined literature and education; and the others are determined to liſten to no reaſoning at all, having with all reaſon and common ſenſe declared eternal warfare.

The deſign of the fifth letter is to ſhew, that in the government of ſuch imperfect creatures as men over each other there muſt be much unavoidable evil; that all human governments, whether of the monarchical, popular, or mixed kinds, were at firſt founded on force or intereſt, and muſt ever be ſupported by the ſame means, that is, by compulſion or corruption, both of which muſt be productive of innumerable evils; that theſe ought not to be imputed to God, becauſe he could not have prevented them without the total alteration of human nature; much leſs can they be eradicated by men; but that they may in ſome meaſure be leſſened by the diminution of moral evil, from which all political evils are derived; and therefore that we ought quietly to ſubmit to theſe evils, when they do not ariſe to any intolerable

tolerable degree, and to apply principally that remedy to the faults of government, which is ever the moſt effectual, that is, the amendment of our own. It is no wonder, that a leſſon ſo diſagreeable to the reſtleſs humours of moſt men, and ſo repugnant to the arts and ends of faction, ſhould call up againſt the author many opponents, who have liberally beſtowed on him the titles of an enemy to liberty, and an advocate for corruption, with the ſame juſtice that a phyſician might be ſtiled an enemy to health, and an advocate for the gout, who in that diſtemper preſcribes patience and temperance, rather than ſuch inflaming medicines as might convert it into a more dangerous diſeaſe. All that he has aſſerted in this letter amounts to no more than this: that no government can ſubſiſt without ſome principle of governing; that is, that men cannot be governed without ſome means by which their obedience can be obtained; a propoſition, which ſeems as inconteſtible, as that every effect muſt have a cauſe. That all

government muſt be diſagreeable to thoſe who are governed, is demonſtrable from the nature and eſſence of government itſelf, which being nothing more than a compulſion of individuals to act in ſuch a manner in ſupport of ſociety, as they are neither wiſe, nor honeſt enough to do from the ſuggeſtions of their own heads or hearts; this compulſion muſt be contrary to both their judgments and inclinations, and conſequently diſagreeable, and for that reaſon perpetually reſiſted: ſome method muſt therefore be made uſe of to overcome this reſiſtance, and what that method can be, except force or intereſt, he cannot find out: he is an advocate for neither, except from their neceſſity; and, if any one will point out another, he will readily declare his diſapprobation of them both.

The ſixth and laſt letter proceeds upon the ſame plan as the reſt, and endeavours to ſhew, that religious evils, that is, the defects ſo viſible in all human religions, and the miſchievous conſequences reſulting from them,

them, are not owing to any want of wiſdom or goodneſs in our Creator, but proceed, like all others, from our nature and ſituation, and the impracticability of giving a perfect religion to an imperfect creature. In order to explain this, it was neceſſary to point out the particular imperfections, which in fact do exiſt in all human religions, whether natural or revealed; not with any deſign to depreciate the one, or to invalidate the authority of the other, but only to account for them conſiſtently with God's wiſdom and benevolence: thoſe charged upon natural religion have been readily enough agreed to, but thoſe imputed to revelation have offended many, who have from thence conſidered the whole of this enquiry as intended ſecretly to undermine the foundations of Chriſtianity, than which nothing can be more averſe from the intentions, as well as from the ſentiments of the author; but indeed many late deiſtical writers have attacked that religion ſo unfairly, by inſinuating many cavils, which they dared not ex-

preſs, that they have made it very difficult for any one to treat freely on that ſubject, without incurring the ſuſpicion of the ſame inſincerity: of all ſuch diſingenuous artifices the author ſincerely declares his utmoſt deteſtation, and begs to be underſtood to mean all that he expreſſes, and nothing more; he ſolemnly profeſſes, that by recounting theſe imperfections, he is ſo far from entertaining any ſecret deſigns deſtructive to that ſacred inſtitution, that by it he intended not only to wreſt out of the hands of infidelity thoſe weapons, with which it has ever been moſt ſucceſsfully aſſaulted, but alſo to obviate all thoſe doubts and difficulties which frequently occur to the minds of thinking men, though no infidels, on viewing the deplorable ſtate in which all human religion has continued throughout all ages, and the ineffectual aſſiſtance it has received even from this divine interpoſition itſelf, by no means exempted from numberleſs evils and imperfections: to thoſe, who perceive none of theſe imperfections, and conſequential evils, he

he means not to write, nor deſires to let in any new light on their tender organs, which can ſerve only to diſturb their preſent repoſe; nor does he aſpire to the honour of working for thoſe middle-ſized underſtandings, who can be well fitted with ready-made arguments from every pulpit: to the learned, impartial, ſagacious, and inquiſitive, he alone applies; the eſtabliſhing one of whom in a rational and well-grounded belief of the Chriſtian Religion does more real ſervice to that cauſe, than the enliſting legions under that denomination whoſe immoveable faith proceeds only from their ignorance; that is, who believing without any reaſon, can poſſibly have no reaſon for doubting. To account for the corruption of religion, it was neceſſary to ſpecify the particular abuſes, and abuſers of it; and here the author could ſcarcely overlook the clergy; but he hopes that nothing has eſcaped his pen, that can throw the leaſt reflection upon them as clergy, but as men only, ſubject to the ſame imperfections, and actuated by the ſame

paſſions as other men, and purſuing the ends of ſelf-intereſt and ambition by the ſame paths, in which all others would have trod, conducted by the ſame temptations and opportunities; he has treated them with no more freedom than he has done princes and parliaments, miniſters and patriots, conquerors and heroes, and his work would admit of no partiality; ſure he is, that nothing he has ſaid can bear the moſt diſtant relation to the preſent clergy of this country, whom he ſincerely thinks are a body of men as honeſt, learned, and unprejudiced, as ever exiſted, and for whoſe perſons and profeſſion he has the higheſt regard. In another part of this letter there is an aſſertion, which has given ſome offence; which is, that every religion muſt be corrupted as ſoon as it becomes eſtabliſhed; this has been thought a reflection upon all national churches, and a perſuaſion to ſchiſm and diſſention; but thoſe who think thus, totally miſapprehend the tenor of this whole work, which endeavours to prove that every thing human muſt

be

be attended with evils, which therefore ought to be ſubmitted to with patience and reſignation; that many imperfections will adhere to all governments and religions in the hands of men, but that theſe, unleſs they riſe to an intolerable degree, will not juſtify our reſiſtance to the one, or our diſſention from the other: the aſſertion itſelf, the author cannot retract, but the inference, which he deſires may be drawn from it, is by no means favourable to diſſentions, becauſe from them he can perceive no remedy, which can accrue to theſe evils; for if it was every one's duty to deſert a national church on account of thoſe corruptions which proceed from its eſtabliſhment, and this duty was univerſally complied with, let us ſee the conſequence! one of theſe things muſt neceſſarily follow: either that ſome diſſention of ſuperior purity, which uſually ariſes from its being a diſſention, muſt be eſtabliſhed in its room, or no religion muſt be eſtabliſhed at all; if the firſt of theſe methods ſhould take place, the end propoſed by it would by

itſelf be entirely defeated; becauſe that purer religion which was eſtabliſhed, would by that very eſtabliſhment become equally corrupt with that which was deſerted; and ſo the ſame reaſon would eternally remain for a new diſſention: if the latter ſhould be taken, that is, to eſtabliſh no religion at all; this would be ſo far from producing the intended reformation, that it would let in ſuch an inundation of enthuſiaſm and contradictory abſurdities, as muſt in a ſhort time deſtroy not only all religion, but all peace and morality whatever; of which no one can entertain the leaſt doubt, who is not totally unacquainted both with the nature and hiſtory of mankind. From whence it is plain, that all diſſentions from a national church, not in itſelf ſinful, ariſe from ignorance; that is, from a kind of ſhort-ſightedneſs, which enables men to pry out every imperfection within their reach, but prevents their diſcerning the more remote neceſſity for thoſe imperfections, and the danger of amending them.

To conclude; the author of this enquiry having heard it ſo much, and as he thought ſo unjuſtly calumniated, has reviewed it with all poſſible care and impartiality, and though he finds many things in the ſtile and compoſition, which have need enough of amendment, he ſees nothing in the ſentiments which ought to be retracted. His intentions were to reconcile the numerous evils ſo conſpicuous in the creation, with the wiſdom, power, and goodneſs of the Creator; to ſhew, that no more of them are admitted by him, than are neceſſary towards promoting univerſal good; and from thence to perſuade men to an entire reſignation to his all-wiſe, but incomprehenſible diſpenſations. To aſcertain the nature of virtue, and to enforce the practice of it; to prove the certainty of a future ſtate, and the juſtice of the rewards and puniſhments that will attend it; to recommend ſubmiſſion to national governments, and conformity to national religions, notwithſtanding the evils and defects, which muſt unavoidably adhere to them; and laſt-

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ly, to ſhew the excellence and credibility of the Chriſtian revelation, to reconcile ſome of its moſt abſtruſe doctrines with reaſon, and to anſwer all thoſe objections to its authority, which have been drawn from its imperfections and abuſes; theſe, and theſe only, were the intentions of the author; and if, after all, a work ſo deſigned, however unably executed, ſhould by the united force of ignorance and malevolence, of faction, bigotry, and enthuſiaſm, be repreſented as introductive of fataliſm, immorality, ſlavery, corruption, and infidelity, he ſhall be little concerned, and ſhall only look upon it as an additional inſtance of that imperfection of mankind, which he has here treated of; from them he deſires only an exemption from calumny; honour and applauſe he has not the vanity to hope for; theſe, he knows, they beſtow not on their benefactors or inſtructors, but reſerve for thoſe alone who deceive, diſturb, and deſtroy them.

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LETTER I.

ON EVIL IN GENERAL.

SIR,

HAVING enjoyed the pleaſure of many accidental conferences with you on metaphyſical, moral, political, and religious ſubjects; on which you ever ſeemed to converſe with more ſagacity, as well as more candor, than is uſual on the like occaſions; I imagined it might not be unentertaining either to you or myſelf, to put together my ſentiments on theſe important topics, and communicate them to you from time to time as the abſence of buſineſs, or of more agreeable amuſements, may afford me opportunity. This I propoſe to do under the general title of an Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil; an inquiry which will comprehend them all, and which, I think, has never been attended to with that diligence it deſerves,

deſerves, nor with that ſucceſs, which might have been hoped for from that little that has been beſtowed upon it. The right underſtanding of this abſtruſe ſpeculation, I look upon to be the only ſolid foundation, on which any rational ſyſtem of ethicks can be built; for it ſeems impoſſible, that men ſhould ever arrive at any juſt ideas of their Creator or his attributes, any proper notions of their relation to him, or their duty to each other, without firſt ſettling in their minds ſome ſatisfactory ſolution of this important queſtion, *Whence came Evil?* Whilſt we find ourſelves liable to innumerable miſeries in this life; apprehenſive of ſtill greater in another; and can give no probable account of this our wretched ſituation; what ſentiments muſt we entertain of the juſtice and benevolence of our Creator, who placed us in it, without our ſolicitations or conſent? The works of the Creation ſufficiently demonſtrate his exiſtence; their beauty, perfection, and magnificence, his infinite power and wiſdom; but it is the happineſs only which

which we enjoy or hope for, which can convince us of his goodneſs.

It is the ſolution therefore of this important queſtion alone, that can aſcertain the moral characteriſtic of God, and upon that only muſt all human virtue eternally depend.

> If there's a power above us,
> (And that there is all Nature cries aloud
> Thro' all her works) he muſt delight in virtue,
> And that which he delights in, muſt be happy.

But ſhould this divine reaſoning of the philoſopher be at laſt inconcluſive; could we once entertain ſuch blaſphemous notions of the Supreme Being, as that he might not delight in virtue, neither adhere to it himſelf, nor reward it in others; that he could make any part of his creation miſerable, or ſuffer them to make themſelves ſo without a juſt cauſe and a benevolent end, all moral conſiderations muſt be vain and uſeleſs; we can have no rule by which to direct our actions, nor if we had, any kind of obligation to purſue it; nor in this caſe can any revelation in the leaſt aſſiſt us, the belief of all revelation being

being in its own nature ſubſequent, not only to the belief of God's exiſtence, but of his juſtice and veracity; for if God can injure us, he may alſo deceive us; and then there is an end of all diſtinctions between good and evil, truth and falſehood, and of all confidence in God and man.

I mean not by this to inſinuate the leaſt poſſibility of a doubt concerning the juſtice or goodneſs of our Creator, but only to ſhew the importance of this inquiry, and the utility of it towards ſettling our notions of his attributes, and the regulation of our own behaviour in conformity to them. I intend not by it to prove the benevolence of God, but to reconcile the miſeries we ſee and ſuffer, with that incontrovertible benevolence; I deſign not to ſhew that God approves virtue, but that the admiſſion of moral evil is not inconſiſtent with that undoubted approbation; nor would I be underſtood to aſſert, that our obligation to be virtuous depends on this abſtruſe ſpeculation, but only that our right underſtanding it will remove all doubts

doubts concerning the nature of virtue, and our obligation to purſue it, and fix them on the moſt firm and immoveable baſis.

To find out therefore how evil of any kind can be the production of infinite goodneſs, joined with infinite power, ſhould be the firſt ſtep in all our religious inquiries; the examination into which wonderful paradox will lead us into many uſeful and ſublime truths; and its perfect comprehenſion, was that poſſible for our narrow capacities, would, I doubt not, make as ſurpriſing diſcoveries in the moral world, as mathematical and phyſical knowledge have in the natural.

To clear up this difficulty, ſome ancient philoſophers have had recourſe to the ſuppoſition of two firſt cauſes, one good, and the other evil, perpetually counteracting each other's deſigns. This ſyſtem was afterwards adopted by the *Manichæan* hereſy, and has ſince been defended by the ingenious *Monſ. Bayle:* but as the ſuppoſition of two firſt cauſes is even in itſelf a contradiction,

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and as the whole ſcheme has been demonſtrated by the beſt metaphyſical writers to be as falſe as it is impious, all further arguments to diſprove it would be needleſs.

Others have endeavoufed to account for this by the introduction of a golden age, or paradiſiacal ſtate, in which all was innocence and happineſs.

Pæna metuſque aberant, nec verba minacia fixo
Ære legebantur, nec ſupplex turba timebant
Judicis ora ſui: ſed erant ſine vindice tuti.

When man yet new,
No rule but uncorrupted reaſon knew,
And with a native bent did good purſue;
Unforc'd by puniſhment, unaw'd by fear,
His words were ſimple, and his ſoul ſincere:
Needleſs was written law, when none oppreſt,
The law of man was written in his breaſt:
No ſuppliant crowds before the judge appear'd,
No court erected yet, nor cauſe was heard,
But all was ſafe, for conſcience was their guard.

Ver erat æternum, placidiſque tepentibus auris
Mulcebant Zephyri natos ſine ſemine flores;
Mox etiam fruges tellus inarata ferebat,
Nec renovatus ager gravidis canebat ariſtis
Flumina

Flumina jam lactis, jam flumina nectaris ibant,
Flavaque de viridi ſtillabant ilice mella.

The flow'rs unſown in fields and meadows reign'd,
And weſtern winds immortal ſpring maintain'd.
In following years the bearded corn enſu'd
From earth unaſk'd, nor was that earth renew'd.
From veins of valleys milk and nectar broke,
And honey ſweated from the pores of oak.

Amuſing dreams! as abſurd in philoſophy, as in poetry delightful! For though it is probable, from the moſt ancient hiſtories, as well as from analogy drawn from the reſt of Nature's productions, that the world might be more happy and more innocent in its infancy, than in more advanced ages; yet that it could ever be totally free from vice and miſery, may eaſily, I think, be proved impoſſible, both from the nature of this terreſtrial globe, and the nature of its inhabitants. So that theſe inchanting ſcenes can in fact never have exiſted; but if they had, the ſhort duration of this perfection is equally inconſiſtent with infinite power, joined to infinite wiſdom and goodneſs, as any

original imperfection whatever. Fables then of this kind can never in the leaſt account for the origin of evil; they are all but mean expedients, which will never be able to take away the difficulty, and can at moſt but obſcure it, by ſhifting it a little backward into a leſs clear light; like that *Indian* philoſophy, accounting for the ſupport of the world, which informs us, that it is ſuſtained by a vaſt elephant, and that elephant by a tortoiſe, and then prudently drops any further inquiry.

The divines and moraliſts of later ages ſeem perfectly ſatisfied that they have looſed this Gordian knot, by imputing the ſource of all evil to the abuſe of free-will in created beings. God, they ſay, never deſigned any ſuch thing ſhould exiſt as evil, moral or natural; but that giving to ſome beings, for good and wiſe purpoſes, a power of free-agency, they perverted this power to bad ends, contrary to his intentions and commands; and thus their accidental wickedneſs produced conſequential miſery. But

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to ſuppoſe in this manner, that God intended all things to be good and happy, and at the ſame time gave being to creatures able and willing to obſtruct his benevolent deſigns, is a notion ſo inconſiſtent with his wiſdom, goodneſs, omniſcience, and omnipotence, that it ſeems equally unphiloſophical, and more evidently abſurd than the other. They have been led into this error by ridiculouſly judging of the diſpenſations of a Creator to his creatures, by the ſame rules which they apply to the dealings of men towards each other; between which there is not the leaſt proportion or ſimilitude. A man who endeavours, to the utmoſt of his power, to make others virtuous and happy, however unſucceſsful, is ſufficiently juſtified; but in a Being omnipotent and omniſcient, the cauſe of all cauſes, the origin of all thought, will, and action; who ſees all things paſt, preſent, and to come, in one inſtantaneous view, the caſe is widely different: his active and permiſſive will muſt be exactly the ſame; and, in regard to him, all conſequen-

tial and future evils, through every moment of time, are actually preſent.

Since therefore none of theſe pretended ſolutions can, I am certain, give ſatisfaction to your comprehenſive underſtanding, let us now try to find out one more rational and more conſiſtent with the analogy of every thing around us.

That there is a Supreme Being infinitely powerful, wiſe, and benevolent, the great Creator and Preſerver of all things, is a truth ſo clearly demonſtrated, that it ſhall here be taken for granted. That there is alſo in the univerſal ſyſtem of things, the works of his almighty hand, much miſery and wickedneſs, that is, much natural and moral evil, is another truth, of which every hour's fatal experience cannot fail to convince us. How theſe two undoubted, yet ſeeming contradictory truths can be reconciled, that is, how evils of any ſort could have place in the works of an omnipotent and good Being, is very difficult to account for. If we aſſert that he could not prevent them, we deſtroy his

his power; if that he would not, we arraign his goodneſs; and therefore his power and goodneſs cannot both be infinite.

But however concluſive this argument may ſeem, there is ſomewhere or other an error in it; and this error I take to ariſe from our wrong notions of omnipotence. Omnipotence cannot work contradictions, it can only effect all poſſible things. But ſo little are we acquainted with the whole ſyſtem of nature, that we know not what are poſſible, and what are not; but if we may judge from that conſtant mixture of pain with pleaſure, and of inconvenience with advantage, which we muſt obſerve in every thing around us, we have reaſon to conclude, that to endue created beings with perfection, that is, to produce good excluſive of evil, is one of thoſe impoſſibilities which even infinite power cannot accompliſh.

The true ſolution then of this incomprehenſible paradox muſt be this, that all evils owe their exiſtence ſolely to the neceſſity of their own natures; by which I mean, they could not poſſibly have been prevented,

without the loſs of ſome ſuperior good, or the permiſſion of ſome greater evil than themſelves; or that many evils will unavoidably inſinuate themſelves by the natural relations and circumſtances of things, into the moſt perfect ſyſtem of created beings, even in oppoſition to the will of an Almighty Creator, by reaſon they cannot be excluded without working contradictions; which not being proper objects of power, it is no diminution of omnipotence to affirm that it cannot effect them.

And here it will be proper to make a previous apology for an expreſſion, which will frequently occur in the following pages, which is, that God cannot do ſuch and ſuch things; by which is always to be underſtood not any retrenchment of the divine omnipotence, but only that ſuch things are in their own natures impracticable, and impoſſible to be performed.

That the Almighty ſhould be thus limited, and circumſcribed by the nature of things, of which he himſelf is the author, may to ſome ſeem not very intelligible; but ſurely

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it is not at all difficult to conceive, that in every poſſible method of ordering, diſpoſing, and framing the univerſal ſyſtem of things, ſuch numberleſs inconveniences might neceſſarily ariſe, that all that infinite power and wiſdom could do, was to make choice of that method, which was attended with the leaſt and feweſt; and this not proceeding from any defect of power in the Creator, but from that imperfection which is inherent in the nature of all created things.

This neceſſity, I imagine, is what the ancients meant by fate, to which they fancied that *Jupiter* and all the gods were obliged to ſubmit, and which was to be controuled by no power whatever. The *Stoicks* ſeem to have had ſome dark and unintelligible notions of this kind, which they neither underſtood themſelves, nor knew how to explain to others; that the untractableneſs of matter was the cauſe of evil; that God would have made all things perfect, but that there was in matter an evil bias repugnant to his benevolence, which drew another way,

whence aroſe all manner of evils. Of the like kind is a maxim of the ſame philoſophers, that pain is no evil; which, if aſſerted with regard to the individuals who ſuffer it, is downright nonſenſe; but if conſidered as it affects the univerſal ſyſtem, is an undoubted truth, and means only that there is no more pain in it than what is neceſſary to the production of happineſs. How many ſoever of theſe evils then force themſelves into the creation, ſo long as the good preponderates, it is a work well worthy of infinite wiſdom and benevolence; and notwithſtanding the imperfections of its parts, the whole is moſt undoubtedly perfect.

Hence then we may plainly ſee that much evil may exiſt, not at all inconſiſtent with the power and goodneſs of God; and the further we purſue this clue, the more we ſhall, at every ſtep, diſcern new lights break out, which will diſcover clearly numberleſs examples, where the infinite power and goodneſs of God is fairly reconcileable with the miſery and wickedneſs of his creatures,

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from the impoſſibility of preventing them; and if, in the very ſmall part of the univerſal ſyſtem that lies within the reach of our imperfect capacities, many inſtances of this kind appear, in which they are viſibly conſiſtent, we ought, with the utmoſt aſſurance, to conclude what is undoubtedly true, that they are really ſo in all, though we are not able to comprehend them. This is the kind of faith moſt worthy of the human underſtanding, and moſt meritorious in the ſight of God, as it is the offspring of reaſon, as well as the parent of all virtue and reſignation to the juſt, but unſcrutable diſpenſations of providence.

But in order more clearly to explain this abſtruſe ſpeculation, it will be neceſſary to divide evils into their different ſpecies, and beſtow on each a ſeparate conſideration. This I ſhall do under the following heads: Evils of Imperfection, Natural Evils, Moral Evils, Political Evils, and Religious Evils; which, I think, will comprehend moſt of thoſe to which human nature is unhappily

happily liable. And now, Sir, leſt I ſhould add one more evil to this melancholy catalogue, which is that of a long and tedious epiſtle, I ſhall reſerve the examination into each of theſe particulars for the ſubject of a future letter; and conclude this, by aſſuring you that I am,

SIR, &c.

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LETTER II.

ON EVILS OF IMPERFECTION.

SIR,

IN purſuance of the plan propoſed in my laſt, I ſhall now proceed to examine into the nature of each particular kind of evil, and in the firſt place of thoſe therein denominated evils of imperfection; which are in truth no evils at all, but rather the abſence of ſome comparative good; and therefore I ſhall not have occaſion to detain you long on this part of my ſubject.

No ſyſtem can poſſibly be formed, even in imagination, without a ſubordination of parts. Every animal body muſt have different members ſubſervient to each other; every picture muſt be compoſed of various colours, and of light and ſhade; all harmony muſt be formed of trebles, tenors, and baſſes; every beautiful and uſeful edifice

muſt conſiſt of higher and lower, more and leſs magnificent apartments. This is in the very eſſence of all created things, and therefore cannot be prevented by any means whatever, unleſs by not creating them at all: for which reaſon, in the formation of the univerſe, God was obliged, in order to carry on that juſt ſubordination ſo neceſſary to the very exiſtence of the whole, to create beings of different ranks; and to beſtow on various ſpecies of animals, and alſo on the individuals of the ſame ſpecies, various degrees of underſtanding, ſtrength, beauty, and perfection; to the comparative want of which advantages we give the names of folly, weakneſs, deformity, and imperfection, and very unjuſtly repute them evils; whereas in truth they are bleſſings as far as they extend, though of an inferior degree. They are no more actual evils, than a ſmall eſtate is a real misfortune, becauſe many may be poſſeſſed of greater.

Whatever we enjoy, is purely a free gift from our Creator; but that we enjoy no more,

more, can never ſure be deemed an injury, or a juſt reaſon to queſtion his infinite benevolence. All our happineſs is owing to his goodneſs; but that it is no greater, is owing only to ourſelves, that is, to our not having any inherent right to any happineſs, or even to any exiſtence at all. This is no more to be imputed to God, than the wants of a beggar to the perſon who has relieved him: that he had ſomething, was owing to his benefactor; but that he had no more, only to his original poverty.

They who look upon the privation of all the good they ſee others enjoy, or think poſſible for infinite power to beſtow, as poſitive evil, underſtand not that the univerſe is a ſyſtem whoſe very eſſence conſiſts in ſubordination; a ſcale of beings deſcending by inſenſible degrees from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing; in which, though we may juſtly expect to find perfection in the whole, could we poſſibly comprehend it; yet would it be the higheſt abſurdity to hope for it in all its parts, becauſe the beauty and happi-

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neſs of the whole depend altogether on the juſt inferiority of its parts, that is, on the comparative imperfections of the ſeveral beings of which it is compoſed.

It would have been no more an inſtance of God's wiſdom to have created no beings but of the higheſt and moſt perfect order, than it would be of a painter's art to cover his whole piece with one ſingle colour the moſt beautiful he could compoſe. Had he confined himſelf to ſuch, nothing could have exiſted but demi-gods or arch-angels, and then all inferior orders muſt have been void and uninhabited: but as it is ſurely more agreeable to infinite benevolence, that all theſe ſhould be filled up with beings capable of enjoying happineſs themſelves, and contributing to that of others, they muſt neceſſarily be filled with inferior beings, that is, with ſuch as are leſs perfect, but from whoſe exiſtence, notwithſtanding that leſs perfection, more felicity upon the whole accrues to the univerſe, than if no ſuch had been created. It is moreover highly probable, that there is ſuch

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a connection between all ranks and orders by ſubordinate degrees, that they mutually ſupport each other's exiſtence, and every one in its place is abſolutely neceſſary towards ſuſtaining the whole vaſt and magnificent fabric.

You ſee, therefore, that it is utterly impracticable, even for infinite power, to exclude from creation this neceſſary inferiority of ſome beings in compariſon with others. All that it can do is to make each as happy as their reſpective ſituations will permit: and this it has done in ſo extraordinary a manner, as to leave the benevolence of our great Creator not to be doubted of; for though he cannot make all ſuperior, yet in the diſpenſations of his bleſſings, his wiſdom and goodneſs both are well worthy the higheſt admiration; for, amongſt all the wide diſtinctions which he was obliged to make in the dignity and perfections of his creatures, he has made much leſs in their happineſs than is uſually imagined, or indeed can be believed from outward appearances.

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He has given many advantages to brutes, which man cannot attain to with all his ſuperiority, and many probably to man which are denied to angels; amongſt which his ignorance is perhaps none of the leaſt. With regard to him, though it was neceſſary to the great purpoſes of human life to beſtow riches, underſtanding, and health, on individuals in very partial proportions; yet has the Almighty ſo contrived the nature of things, that happineſs is diſtributed with a more equal hand. His goodneſs, we may obſerve, is always ſtriving with theſe our neceſſary imperfections, and ſetting bounds to the inconveniences it cannot totally prevent, by balancing the wants, and repaying the ſufferings of all by ſome kind of equivalent naturally reſulting from their particular ſituations and circumſtances. Thus, for example, poverty or the want of riches is generally compenſated by having more hopes and fewer fears, by a greater ſhare of health, and a more exquiſite reliſh of the ſmalleſt enjoyments than thoſe who poſſeſs them are uſu-

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ally bleſſed with. The want of taſte and genius, with all the pleaſures that ariſe from them, are commonly recompenced by a more uſeful kind of common-ſenſe, together with a wonderful delight, as well as ſucceſs, in the buſy purſuits of a ſcrambling world. The ſufferings of the ſick are greatly relieved by many trifling gratifications imperceptible to others, ſometimes almoſt repaid by the inconceivable tranſports occaſioned by the return of health and vigour. Folly cannot be very grievous, becauſe imperceptible; and I doubt not but there is ſome truth in that rant of a mad poet, that there is a pleaſure in being mad, which none but madmen know. Ignorance, or the want of knowledge and literature, the appointed lot of all born to poverty, and the drudgeries of life, is the only opiate capable of infuſing that inſenſibility which can enable them to endure the miſeries of the one, and the fatigues of the other. It is a cordial adminiſtered by the gracious hand of providence; of which they ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged

and improper education. It is the baſis of all ſubordination, the ſupport of ſociety, and the privilege of individuals; and I have ever thought it a moſt remarkable inſtance of the divine wiſdom, that whereas in all animals, whoſe individuals riſe little above the reſt of their ſpecies, knowledge is inſtinctive; in man, whoſe individuals are ſo widely different, it is acquired by education; by which means the prince and the labourer, the philoſopher and the peaſant, are in ſome meaſure fitted for their reſpective ſituations. The ſame parental care extends to every part of the animal creation. Brutes are exempted from numberleſs anxieties, by that happy want of reflection on paſt, and apprehenſion of future ſufferings, which are annexed to their inferiority. Thoſe amongſt them who devour others, are taught by nature to diſpatch them as eaſily as poſſible; and man, the moſt mercileſs devourer of all, is induced, by his own advantage, to feaſt thoſe deſigned for his ſuſtenance, the more luxuriouſly to feaſt upon them himſelf. Thus

miſery, by all poſſible methods, is diminiſhed or repaid; and happineſs, like fluids, is ever tending towards an equilibrium.

But was it ever ſo unequally divided, our pretence for complaint could be of this only, that we are not ſo high in the ſcale of exiſtence as our ignorant ambition may deſire: a pretence which muſt eternally ſubſiſt; becauſe, were we ever ſo much higher, there would be ſtill room for infinite power to exalt us; and ſince no link in the chain can be broke, the ſame reaſon for diſquiet muſt remain to thoſe who ſucceed to that chaſm, which muſt be occaſioned by our preferment. A man can have no reaſon to repine, that he is not an angel; nor a horſe, that he is not a man; much leſs, that in their ſeveral ſtations they poſſeſs not the faculties of another; for this would be an inſufferable misfortune. And doubtleſs it would be as inconvenient for a man to be endued with the knowledge of an angel, as for a horſe to have the reaſon of a man;

but as they are now formed by the conſummate wiſdom of their Creator, each enjoys pleaſures peculiar to his ſituation: and though the happineſs of one may perhaps conſiſt in divine contemplation, of another in the acquiſition of wealth and power, and that of a third in wandering amongſt limpid ſtreams, and luxuriant paſtures; yet the meaneſt of theſe enjoyments give no interruption to the moſt ſublime, but altogether undoubtedly increaſe the aggregate ſum of felicity beſtowed upon the univerſe. Greatly indeed muſt that be leſſened, were there no beings but of the higheſt orders. Did there not for inſtance, exiſt on this terreſtrial globe any ſenſitive creatures inferior to man, how great a quantity of happineſs muſt have been loſt, which is now enjoyed by millions, who at preſent inhabit every part of its ſurface, in fields and gardens, in extended deſarts, impenetrable woods, and immenſe oceans; by monarchies of bees, republics of ants, and innumerable families of inſects dwelling on every leaf and

 flower,

ſlower, who are all poſſeſſed of as great a ſhare of pleaſure, and a greater of innocence, than their arrogant ſovereign, and at the ſame time not a little contribute to his convenience and happineſs.

Has God, thou fool! work'd ſolely for thy good!
Thy joy, thy paſtime, thy attire, thy food!
Who for thy table feeds the wanton fawn,
For him as kindly ſpreads the flow'ry lawn.
Is it for thee the lark aſcends and ſings?
Joy tunes his voice, joy elevates his wings.
Is it for thee the linnet pours his throat?
Loves of his own, and raptures, ſwell the note.
The bounding ſteed you pompouſly beſtride,
Shares with his lord the pleaſure and the pride.
Is thine alone the ſeed that ſtrews the plain?
The birds of heav'n ſhall vindicate their grain.
Thine the full harveſt of the golden year?
Part pays, and juſtly, the deſerving ſteer.

POPE.

Thus the univerſe reſembles a large and well-regulated family, in which all the officers and ſervants, and even the domeſtic animals, are ſubſervient to each other in a proper ſubordination; each enjoys the

privileges and perquiſites peculiar to his place, and at the ſame time contributes by that juſt ſubordination to the magnificence and happineſs of the whole.

It is evident, therefore, that theſe evils of imperfection, proceeding from the neceſſary inferiority of ſome beings in compariſon of others, can in no ſenſe be called any evils at all; but if they could, it is as evident from thence, that there are many which even infinite power cannot prevent; it being ſufficiently demonſtrable, that to produce a ſyſtem of created beings, all ſupreme in happineſs and dignity, a government compoſed of all kings, an army of all generals, or an univerſe of all gods, muſt be impracticable for omnipotence itſelf.

We have here then made a large ſtride towards our intended goal, having at once acquitted the divine goodneſs, and freed mankind from a numerous train of imaginary evils, by moſt clearly ſhewing them to be no evils at all; and yet under this head are really comprehended all the evils we perpetually

tually complain of, except actual pain, the nature of which, and how it came to have a place in the works of an omnipotent and good being, ſhall be conſidered in the next letter from,

SIR, &c.

LETTER III.

ON NATURAL EVILS.

SIR,

I Shall now lay before you my free ſentiments concerning the origin of natural evils, by which I underſtand the ſufferings of ſenſitive beings only; for tempeſts, inundations, and earthquakes, with all the diſorders of the material world, are no farther evils than as they affect the ſenſitive; ſo that under this head can be only comprehended pains of body, and inquietudes of mind. That theſe are real evils, I readily acknowledge; and if any one is philoſopher enough to doubt of it, I ſhall only beg leave to refer him to a ſevere fit of ſickneſs or a tedious law-ſuit, for farther ſatisfaction.

The production of happineſs ſeems to be the only motive that could induce infinite goodneſs to exert infinite power to create all things;

things; for, to ſay truth, happineſs is the only thing of real value in exiſtence; neither riches, nor power, nor wiſdom, nor learning, nor ſtrength, nor beauty, nor virtue, nor religion, nor even life itſelf, being of any importance but as they contribute to its production. All theſe are in themſelves neither good nor evil; happineſs alone is their great end, and they deſirable only as they tend to promote it. Moſt aſtoniſhing therefore it muſt appear to every one who looks round him, to obſerve all creatures bleſſed with life and ſenſation, that is, all creatures made capable of happineſs, at the ſame time by their own natures condemned to innumerable and unavoidable miſeries. Whence can it proceed, that providence ſhould thus ſeem to counteract his own benevolent intentions? To what ſtrange and inviſible cauſe are all theſe numerous and invincible evils indebted for their exiſtence? If God is a good and benevolent being, what end could he propoſe from creation, but the propagation of happineſs? and

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if happineſs is the end of all exiſtence, why are not all creatures that do exiſt happy?

The true ſolution of this important queſtion, ſo long and ſo vainly ſearched for by the philoſophers of all ages and all countries, I take to be at laſt no more than this, that theſe real evils proceed from the ſame ſource as thoſe imaginary ones of imperfection before treated of, namely, from that ſubordination, without which no created ſyſtem can ſubſiſt; all ſubordination implying imperfection, all imperfection evil, and all evil ſome kind of inconvenience or ſuffering; ſo that there muſt be particular inconveniences and ſufferings annexed to every particular rank of created beings by the circumſtances of things, and their modes of exiſtence. Moſt of thoſe to which we ourſelves are liable may be eaſily ſhewn to be of this kind, the effects only of human nature, and the ſtation man occupies in the univerſe: and therefore their origin is plainly deducible from neceſſity; that is, they could not have been prevented without the loſs of greater

good,

good, or the admiſſion of greater evils than themſelves; or by not creating any ſuch creatures as men at all. And though this upon a general view of things, does not ſo forcibly ſtrike us; yet on a more minute inſpection into every grievance attendant on human nature, it will moſt evidently appear. Moſt of theſe, I think, may be comprehended under the following heads: poverty, labour, inquietudes of mind, pains of body, and death; from none of which we may venture to affirm man could ever have been exempted ſo long as he continued to be man. God indeed might have made us quite other creatures, and placed us in a world quite otherwiſe conſtituted; but then we had been no longer men; and whatever beings had occupied our ſtations in the univerſal ſyſtem, they muſt have been liable to the ſame inconveniences.

Poverty, for example, is what all could not poſſibly have been exempted from, not only by reaſon of the fluctuating nature of human poſſeſſions, but becauſe the world could

could not ſubſiſt without it; for had all been rich, none could have ſubmitted to the commands of another, or the drudgeries of life; thence all governments muſt have been diſſolved, arts neglected, and lands uncultivated, and ſo an univerſal penury have overwhelmed all, inſtead of now and then pinching a few. Hence, by the bye, appears the great excellence of charity, by which men are enabled, by a particular diſtribution of the bleſſings and enjoyments of life, on proper occaſions, to prevent that poverty, which by a general one omnipotence itſelf could never have prevented: ſo that, by enforcing this duty, God as it were demands our aſſiſtance to promote univerſal happineſs, and to ſhut out miſery at every door, where it ſtrives to intrude itſelf.

Labour, indeed, God might eaſily have excuſed us from, ſince at his command the earth would readily have poured forth all her treaſures without our inconſiderable aſſiſtance; but if the ſevereſt labour cannot ſufficiently ſubdue the malignity of human nature, what

what plots and machinations, what wars, rapine, and devaſtation, what profligacy and licentiouſneſs muſt have been the conſequences of univerſal idleneſs! So that labour ought only to be looked upon as a taſk kindly impoſed upon us by our indulgent Creator, neceſſary to preſerve our health, our ſafety, and our innocence.

Inquietudes of mind cannot be prevented without firſt eradicating all our inclinations and paſſions, the winds and tides that preſerve the great ocean of human life from perpetual ſtagnation. So long as men have purſuits, they muſt meet with diſappointments; and whilſt they have diſappointments they muſt be diſquieted; whilſt they are injured, they muſt be inflamed with anger; and whilſt they ſee cruelties, they muſt be melted with pity; whilſt they perceive danger, they muſt be ſenſible of fear; and whilſt they behold beauty, they muſt be inſlaved by love: nor can they be exempted from the various anxieties attendant on theſe various and turbulent paſſions. Yet without

out them we ſhould be undoubtedly leſs happy and leſs ſafe; for without anger we ſhould not defend ourſelves, and without pity we ſhould not aſſiſt others; without fear we ſhould not preſerve our lives; and without love they would not be worth preſerving.

Pains of body are perhaps but the neceſſary conſequences of the union of material and ſpiritual eſſences; for matter being by nature diviſible, when endued with ſenſibility, muſt probably be affected by pains and pleaſures by its different modifications; wherefore to have been freed from our ſufferings, we muſt have been deprived of all our ſenſual enjoyments; a compoſition by which few ſurely would be gainers. Beſides, the pains of our bodies are neceſſary to make us continually mindful of their preſervation; for what numberleſs lives would be loſt in every trifling purſuit, or flung away in ill humour, was the piercing of a ſword no more painful than the tickling of a feather.

Death, the laſt and moſt dreadful of all evils,

evils, is ſo far from being one, that it is the infallible cure for all others.

To die is landing on ſome ſilent ſhore,
Where billows never beat, nor tempeſts roar;
Ere well we feel the friendly ſtroke 'tis o'er.
GARTH.

For, abſtracted from the ſickneſs and ſufferings uſually attending it, it is no more than the expiration of that term of life God was pleaſed to beſtow on us, without any claim or merit on our part. But was it an evil ever ſo great, it could not be remedied but by one much greater, which is by living for ever; by which means our wickedneſs, unreſtrained by the proſpect of a future ſtate, would grow ſo inſupportable, our ſufferings ſo intolerable by perſeverance, and our pleaſures ſo tireſome by repetition, that no being in the univerſe could be ſo completely miſerable as a ſpecies of immortal men. We have no reaſon therefore to look upon death as an evil, or to fear it as a puniſhment, even without any ſuppoſition of a future life; but if we conſider

ſider it as a paſſage to a more perfect ſtate, or a remove only in an eternal ſucceſſion of ſtill improving ſtates (for which we have the ſtrongeſt reaſons) it will then appear a new favour from the divine munificence; and a man muſt be as abſurd to repine at dying, as a traveller would be, who propoſed to himſelf a delightful tour through various unknown countries, to lament that he cannot take up his reſidence at the firſt dirty inn which he baits at on the road. The inſtability of human life, or the haſty changes of its ſucceſſive periods, of which we ſo frequently complain, are no more than the neceſſary progreſs of it to this neceſſary concluſion; and are ſo far from being evils deſerving theſe complaints, that they are the ſource of our greateſt pleaſures, as they are the ſource of all novelty, from which our greateſt pleaſures are ever derived. The continual ſucceſſion of ſeaſons in the human life, by daily preſenting to us new ſcenes, render it agreeable, and, like thoſe of the year, afford us delights by their change,

which

which the choiceſt of them could not give us by their continuance. In the ſpring of life, the gilding of the ſun-ſhine, the verdure of the fields, and the variegated paintings of the ſky, are ſo exquiſite in the eyes of infants at their firſt looking abroad into a new world, as nothing perhaps afterwards can equal. The heat and vigour of the ſucceeding ſummer of youth ripens for us new pleaſures, the blooming maid, the nightly revel, and the jovial chace. The ſerene autumn of compleat manhood feaſts us with the golden harveſts of our worldly purſuits: nor is the hoary winter of old age deſtitute of its peculiar comforts and enjoyments, of which the recollection and relation of thoſe paſt are perhaps none of the leaſt; and at laſt death opens to us a new proſpect, from whence we ſhall probably look back upon the diverſions and occupations of this world with the ſame contempt we do now on our tops and hobby-horſes, and with the ſame ſurpriſe, that they could ever ſo much entertain or engage us.

Thus we ſee all theſe evils could never

have been prevented even by infinite power, without the introduction of greater, or the loſs of ſuperior good; they are but the neceſſary conſequences of human nature; from which it can no more be diveſted than matter from extenſion, or heat from motion, which proceed from the very modes of their exiſtence.

If it be objected, that, after all that has been ſaid, there are innumerable miſeries entailed upon all things that have life, and particularly on man; many diſeaſes of the body and afflictions of mind, in which nature ſeems to play the tyrant, ingenious in contriving torments for her children; that we cannot avoid ſeeing every moment with horror numbers of our fellow-creatures condemned to tedious and intolerable miſeries, ſome expiring on racks, others roaſting in flames, ſome ſtarving in dungeons, others raving in mad-houſes, ſome broiling in fevers, others groaning whole months under the exquiſite tortures of gout and ſtone: If it be ſaid further, that ſome men being exempted

exempted from many calamities with which others are afflicted, proves plainly that all might have been exempted from all; the charge can by no means be diſputed, nor can it be alledged that infinite power could not have prevented moſt of theſe dreadful calamities. From hence, therefore, I am perſuaded, that there is ſomething in the abſtract nature of pain conducive to pleaſure; that the ſufferings of individuals are abſolutely neceſſary to univerſal happineſs; and that, from connections to us inconceivable, it was impracticable for omnipotence to produce the one, without at the ſame time permitting the other. Their conſtant and uniform concomitancy through every part of nature with which we are acquainted, very much corroborates this conjecture, in which ſcarce one inſtance, I believe, can be produced of the acquiſition of pleaſure or convenience by any creatures, which is not purchaſed by the previous or conſequential ſufferings of themſelves or others; pointing out, as it were, that a certain allay of pain muſt be

caſt into the univerſal maſs of created happineſs, and inflicted ſomewhere for the benefit of the whole. Over what mountains of ſlain is every mighty empire rolled up to the ſummit of proſperity and luxury, and what new ſcenes of deſolation attend its fall? To what infinite toil of men, and other animals, is every flouriſhing city indebted for all the conveniences and enjoyments of life, and what vice and miſery do thoſe very enjoyments introduce? The pleaſures peculiar to the continuing our ſpecies are ſeverely paid for by pains and perils in one ſex, and by cares and anxieties in both. Thoſe annexed to the preſervation of ourſelves are both preceded and followed by numberleſs ſufferings; preceded by the maſſacres and tortures of various animals preparatory to a feaſt, and followed by as many diſeaſes lying in wait in every diſh to pour forth vengeance on their deſtroyers. Our riches and honours are acquired by laborious or perilous occupations, and our ſports are purſued with ſcarce leſs fatigue or danger,

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and uſually attended with diſtreſſes and deſtruction of innocent animals. This univerſal connection of pain with pleaſure ſeems, I think, ſtrongly to intimate, that pain abſtractedly conſidered muſt have its uſes; and ſince we may be aſſured, that it is never admitted but with the reluctance of the ſupreme author, thoſe uſes muſt be of the higheſt importance, though we have no faculties to conceive them.

The human mind can comprehend but a very ſmall part of the great and aſtoniſhing whole; for any thing we know, the ſufferings (and perhaps the crimes producing thoſe ſufferings) of the inhabitants of this terreſtrial globe may ſome way or other affect thoſe of the moſt diſtant planet, and the whole animal world may be connected by ſome principle as general as that of attraction in the corporeal, and ſo the miſeries of particular beings be ſome way neceſſary to the happineſs of the whole. How theſe things operate, is indeed to us quite inconceivable; but that they do operate in ſome

ſuch extenſive manner is far, I think, from improbable.

All ages and nations ſeem to have had confuſed notions of the merits of ſufferings abſtracted from their tendency to any viſible good, and have paid the higheſt honours to thoſe who have voluntarily endured them, as to their common benefactors. Many in chriſtian countries have formerly been ſainted for long faſting, for whipping or tormenting themſelves, for ſitting whole years in uneaſy poſtures, or expoſing themſelves to the inclemency of the weather on the tops of pillars. Many at this day in the Eaſt are almoſt deified for loading themſelves with heavy chains, bending under burthens, or confining themſelves in chairs ſtuck round with pointed nails. Now, if theſe notions are not totally devoid of all reaſon and common ſenſe, (and few, I believe, are ſo which become univerſal) they can be founded on no other principle than this, of the neceſſity of pain to produce happineſs, which ſeems another weighty inſtance of the probability

of

of this ancient and univerſal opinion, though the reaſons for it are forgot or unknown, and the practices derived from it big with the moſt abſurd and ridiculous ſuperſtitions.

One cauſe, I think, from which many of our ſevereſt ſufferings may be derived, may be diſcovered by analogical reaſoning, that is, by aſſimilating thoſe things which are not objects of our underſtandings to others which lie within their reach. Man is one link of that vaſt chain, deſcending by inſenſible degrees, from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing. As there are many thouſands below him, ſo muſt there be many more above him. If we look downwards, we ſee innumerable ſpecies of inferior beings, whoſe happineſs and lives are dependent on his will; we ſee him cloathed by their ſpoils, and fed by their miſeries and deſtruction, inſlaving ſome, tormenting others, and murdering millions for his luxury or diverſion; is it not therefore analogous and highly probable, that the happineſs and life of man ſhould be equally dependent on the

wills of his ſuperiors? As we receive great part of our pleaſures, and even ſubſiſtence, from the ſufferings and deaths of lower animals, may not theſe ſuperior beings do the ſame from ours, and that by ways as far above the reach of the moſt exalted human underſtandings, as the means by which we receive our benefits are above the capacities of the meaneſt creatures deſtined for our ſervice? The fundamental error in all our reaſonings on this ſubject, is that of placing ourſelves wrong in that preſumptuous climax of beaſt, man, and God; from whence, as we ſuppoſe falſely, that there is nothing above us except the Supreme Being, we fooliſhly conclude that all the evils we labour under muſt be derived immediately from his omnipotent hand: whereas there may be numberleſs intermediate beings who have power to deceive, torment, or deſtroy us, for the ends only of their own pleaſure or utility, who may be veſted with the ſame privileges over their inferiors, and as much benefited by the uſe of them, as ourſelves. In what manner

theſe benefits accrue to them, it is impoſſible for us to conceive; but that impoſſibility leſſens not the probability of this conjecture, which by analogy is ſo ſtrongly confirmed.

Should you, Sir, have been lately employed in reading ſome of thoſe ſublime authors, who, from pride and ignorance, delight to puff up the dignity of human nature, the notions here advanced may appear to you abſurd and incredible, becauſe inconſiſtent with that imaginary dignity; and you may object, that it is impoſſible that God ſhould ſuffer innocence to be thus afflicted, and reaſon thus deceived: that though he may permit animals made ſolely for the uſe of man to be thus abuſed for his convenience or recreation, yet that man himſelf, the ſole poſſeſſor of reaſon, the lord of this terreſtrial globe, his own ambaſſador, vicegerent, and ſimilitude, ſhould be thus dependent on the will of others, muſt be utterly inconſiſtent with the divine wiſdom and juſtice. But pray, Sir, what does all this prove, but the importance of a man to himſelf? Is not the

juſtice

juſtice of God as much concerned to preſerve the happineſs of the meaneſt inſect which he has called into being, as of the greateſt man that ever lived? Are not all creatures we ſee made ſubſervient to each others uſes? and what is there in man, that he only ſhould be exempted from this common fate of all created being? The ſuperiority of man to that of other terreſtrial animals is as inconſiderable, in proportion to the immenſe plan of univerſal exiſtence, as the difference of climate between the north and ſouth end of the paper I now write upon, with regard to the heat and diſtance of the ſun. There is nothing leads us into ſo many errors concerning the works and deſigns of providence, as that fooliſh vanity that can perſuade ſuch inſignificant creatures that all things were made for their ſervice; from whence they ridiculouſly ſet up utility to themſelves as the ſtandard of good, and conclude every thing to be evil which appears injurious to them or their purpoſes. As well might a neſt of ants imagine this globe of earth created only for them

them to caſt up into hillocks, and cloathed with grain and herbage for their ſuſtenance; then accuſe their Creator for permitting ſpades to deſtroy them, and ploughs to lay waſte their habitations; the inconveniences of which they feel, but are utterly unable to comprehend their uſes, as well as the relations they themſelves bear to ſuperior beings.

It is ſurpriſing that none of thoſe philoſophers, who were drove to the ſuppoſition of two firſt cauſes, and many other abſurdities, to account for the origin of evil, ſhould not rather have choſen to impute it to the miniſtration of intermediate beings; and when they ſaw the happineſs of all inferior animals dependent on our wills, ſhould not have concluded, that the good order and well-being of the univerſe might require that ours ſhould be as dependant on the wills of ſuperior beings, accountable like ourſelves to one common lord and father of all things. This is the more wonderful, becauſe the exiſtence and influence of ſuch beings has been

an article in the creed of all religions that have ever appeared in the world. In the beautiful ſyſtem of the pagan theology, their ſilvan and houſhold deities, their nymphs, ſatyrs, and fawns, were of this kind. All the barbarous nations that have ever been diſcovered, have been found to believe and adore intermediate ſpiritual beings, both good and evil. The Jewiſh religion not only confirms the belief of their exiſtence, but of their tempting, deceiving, and tormenting mankind; and the whole ſyſtem of chriſtianity is erected entirely on this foundation.

Thus, Sir, you ſee the good order of the whole, and the happineſs it receives from a proper ſubordination, will ſufficiently account for the ſufferings of individuals; and all ſuch ſhould be conſidered but as the neceſſary taxes, which every member of this great republic of the univerſe is obliged to pay towards the ſupport of the community. It is no derogation from the divine goodneſs, that theſe taxes are not always impoſed equally in the

the preſent ſtate of things; becauſe as every individual is but a part of the great whole, ſo is the preſent ſtate but a part of a long, or perhaps an eternal ſucceſſion of others; and, like a ſingle day in the natural life, has reference to many more both paſt and to come. It is but as a page in a voluminous accompt, from which no judgment can be formed on the ſtate of the whole; but of this we may be aſſured, that the balance will ſome time or other be ſettled with juſtice and impartiality. The certainty, therefore, of a future ſtate, in which we, and indeed all creatures endued with ſenſation, ſhall ſomehow or other exiſt, ſeems (if all our notions of juſtice are not erroneous) as demonſtrable as the juſtice of their Creator; for if he is juſt, all ſuch creatures muſt have their account of happineſs and miſery ſomewhere adjuſted with equity, and all creatures capable of virtue and vice muſt, according to their behaviour, receive rewards and puniſhments; and, to render theſe puniſhments conſiſtent with infinite goodneſs, they muſt

muſt not only be proportioned to their crimes, but alſo ſome way neceſſary to univerſal good; for no creatures can be called out of their primitive nothing by an all-wiſe and benevolent Creator, to be loſers by their exiſtence, or to be made miſerable for no beneficial end, even by their own miſbehaviour: ſo that all future miſery, as well as preſent, muſt be ſubſervient to happineſs, or otherwiſe infinite power, joined with infinite goodneſs, would have prevented both vice and puniſhment.

For this reaſon, amongſt all the ſhort-ſighted conjectures of man into the diſpenſations of providence and a future ſtate, the ancient doctrine of tranſmigration ſeems the moſt rational and moſt conſiſtent with his wiſdom and goodneſs; as by it all the unequal diſpenſations of things ſo neceſſary in one life, may be ſet right in another, and all creatures ſerve the higheſt and loweſt, the moſt eligible and moſt burthenſome offices of life by an equitable kind of rotation; by which means their rewards and puniſhments

may

may not only be well proportioned to their behaviour, but alſo ſubſervient towards carrying on the buſineſs of the univerſe, and thus at the ſame time anſwer the purpoſes of both juſtice and utility. But the pride of man will not ſuffer us to treat this ſubject with the ſeriouſneſs it deſerves; but rejects as both impious and ridiculous every ſuppoſition of inferior creatures ever arriving at its own imaginary dignity, allowing at the ſame time the probability of human nature being exalted to the angelic, a much wider and more extraordinary tranſition, but yet ſuch a one as may probably be the natural conſequence, as well as the reward of a virtuous life; nor is it leſs likely that our vices may debaſe us to the ſervile condition of inferior animals, in whoſe forms we may be ſeverely puniſhed for the injuries we have done to mankind when amongſt them, and be obliged in ſome meaſure to repair them, by performing the drudgeries tyrannically impoſed upon us for their ſervice.

From what has been ſaid, I think, it plainly

plainly appears that numberleſs evils do actually exiſt, which could not have been excluded from the works of infinite goodneſs even by infinite power; and from hence it may be concluded, that there are none which could; but that God has exerted all his omnipotence to introduce all poſſible happineſs, and, as far as the imperfection of created things would permit, to exclude all miſery, that is, all natural evil, from the univerſal ſyſtem; which notwithſtanding will introduce itſelf in many circumſtances, even in oppoſition to infinite power.

The origin of moral evil lies much deeper, and I will venture to aſſert has never yet been fathomed by the ſhort line of human underſtanding. That I ſhall be able to reach it, I have by no means the vanity to imagine; but, laying aſide all pre-conceived opinions and ſyſtematical prejudice, I will in my next endeavour to come as near it as lies in the power of,

SIR, &c.

LET-

LETTER IV.

ON MORAL EVIL.

SIR,

I Muſt now leave that plain and eaſy road through which I have hitherto conducted you, and carry you through unfrequented paths, and ways untrodded by philoſophic feet. Already, I think, the exiſtence of natural evil has been ſufficiently accounted for, without any derogation from the power, wiſdom, or goodneſs of God. What next remains to be cleared up, is the origin of moral evil; which, conſiſtently with the ſame divine attributes, I have never ſeen accounted for by any author ancient or modern, in a manner that could give tolerable ſatisfaction to a rational enquirer. Nor indeed can this be ever effectually performed, without at the ſame time taking into conſideration all thoſe moſt abſtruſe ſpeculations

concerning the nature of virtue, free-will, fate, grace, and predeſtination, the debates of ages, and matter of innumerable folio's. To attempt this, therefore, in the compaſs of a letter would be the higheſt preſumption, did not I well know the clear and ready comprehenſion of the perſon to whom it is addreſſed; and alſo that the moſt difficult of theſe kinds of diſquiſitions are uſually better explained in a few lines, than by a thouſand pages.

In order, therefore, to find out the true origin of moral evil, it will be neceſſary, in the firſt place, to enquire into its nature and eſſence; or what it is that conſtitutes one action evil, and another good. Various have been the opinions of various authors on this criterion of virtue; and this variety has rendered that doubtful, which muſt otherwiſe have been clear and manifeſt to the meaneſt capacity. Some indeed have denied that there is any ſuch thing, becauſe different ages and nations have entertained different ſentiments concerning it: but this is juſt as

reaſonable as to aſſert, that there are neither ſun, moon, or ſtars, becauſe aſtronomers have ſupported different ſyſtems of the motions and magnitudes of theſe celeſtial bodies. Some have placed it in conformity to truth, ſome to the fitneſs of things, and others to the will of God. But all this is merely ſuperficial: they reſolve us not why truth, or the fitneſs of things, are either eligible or obligatory, or why God ſhould require us to act in one manner rather than another. The true reaſon of which can poſſibly be no other than this, becauſe ſome actions produce happineſs, and others miſery; ſo that all moral good and evil are nothing more than the production of the natural. This alone it is that makes truth preferable to falſhood, this that determines the fitneſs of things, and this that induces God to command ſome actions and forbid others. They who extol the truth, beauty, and harmony of virtue, excluſive of its conſequences, deal but in pompous nonſenſe; and they who would perſuade us, that good and evil are things

indifferent, depending wholly on the will of God, do but confound the nature of things, as well as all our notions of God himſelf, by repreſenting him capable of willing contradictions; that is, that we ſhould be, and be happy, and at the ſame time that we ſhould torment and deſtroy each other; for injuries cannot be made benefits, pain cannot be made pleaſure, and conſequently vice cannot be made virtue by any power whatever. It is the conſequences therefore of all human actions that muſt ſtamp their value. So far as the general practice of any action tends to produce good, and introduce happineſs into the world, ſo far we may pronounce it virtuous; ſo much evil as it occaſions, ſuch is the degree of vice it contains. I ſay the general practice, becauſe we muſt always remember, in judging by this rule, to apply it only to the general ſpecies of actions, and not to particular actions; for the infinite wiſdom of God, deſirous to ſet bounds to the deſtructive conſequences which muſt otherwiſe have followed from the

univerſal depravity of mankind, has ſo wonderfully contrived the nature of things, that our moſt vitious actions may ſometimes accidentally and collaterally produce good. Thus, for inſtance, robbery may diſperſe uſeleſs hoards to the benefit of the public; adultery may bring heirs, and good-humour too, into many families, where they would otherwiſe have been wanting; and murder free the world from tyrants and oppreſſors. Luxury maintains its thouſands, and vanity its ten thouſands. Superſtition and arbitrary power contribute to the grandeur of many nations, and the liberties of others are preſerved by the perpetual contentions of avarice, knavery, ſelfiſhneſs, and ambition: and thus the worſt of vices, and the worſt of men, are often compelled by providence to ſerve the moſt beneficial purpoſes, contrary to their own malevolent tendencies and inclinations; and thus private vices become public benefits by the force only of accidental circumſtances. But this impeaches not the truth of the criterion of virtue before men-

tioned, the only ſolid foundation on which any true ſyſtem of ethicks can be built, the only plain, ſimple, and uniform rule by which we can paſs any judgment on our actions; but by this we may be enabled, not only to determine which are good and which are evil, but almoſt mathematically to demonſtrate the proportion of virtue or vice which belongs to each, by comparing them with the degrees of happineſs or miſery which they occaſion. But though the production of happineſs is the eſſence of virtue, it is by no means the end: the great end is the probation of mankind, or the giving them an opportunity of exalting or degrading themſelves in another ſtate by their behaviour in the preſent. And thus indeed it anſwers two moſt important purpoſes; thoſe are, the conſervation of our happineſs and the teſt of our obedience; for had not ſuch a teſt ſeemed neceſſary to God's infinite wiſdom, and productive of univerſal good, he would never have permitted the happineſs of men, even in this life, to have depended

depended on ſo precarious a tenure as their mutual good behaviour to each other. For it is obſervable, that he who beſt knows our formation, has truſted no one thing of importance to our reaſon or virtue: he truſts only to our appetites for the ſupport of the individual, and the continuance of our ſpecies; to our vanity, or compaſſion, for our bounty to others; and to our fears for the preſervation of ourſelves; often to our vices for the ſupport of government, and ſometimes to our follies for the preſervation of our religion. But ſince ſome teſt of our obedience was neceſſary, nothing ſure could have been commanded for that end ſo fit and proper, and at the ſame time ſo uſeful, as the practice of virtue; nothing have been ſo juſtly rewarded with happineſs, as the production of happineſs in conformity to the will of God. It is this conformity alone which adds merit to virtue, and conſtitutes the eſſential difference between morality and religion. Morality obliges men to live honeſtly and ſoberly, becauſe ſuch behaviour

is moſt conducive to public happineſs, and conſequently to their own; religion, to purſue the ſame courſe, becauſe conformable to the will of their Creator. Morality induces them to embrace virtue from prudential conſiderations; religion, from thoſe of gratitude and obedience. Morality, therefore, entirely abſtracted from religion, can have nothing meritorious in it; it being but wiſdom, prudence, or good œconomy, which like health, beauty, or riches, are rather obligations conferred upon us by God, than merits in us towards him; for though we may be juſtly puniſhed for injuring ourſelves, we can claim no reward for ſelf-preſervation; as ſuicide deſerves puniſhment and infamy, but a man deſerves no reward or honours for not being guilty of it. This I take to be the meaning of all thoſe paſſages in our ſcriptures, in which works are repreſented to have no merit without faith; that is, not without believing in hiſtorical facts, in creeds, and articles: but without being done in purſuance of our belief in God, and in obedience to his commands.

commands *. And now, having mentioned ſcripture, I cannot omit obſerving, that the chriſtian is the only religious or moral inſtitution in the world that ever ſet in a right light theſe two material points, the eſſence and the end of virtue; that ever founded the one in the production of happineſs, that is, in univerſal benevolence, or, in their lan-

* What was that faith which the author of the chriſtian religion indiſpenſably required in all his diſciples? It could not be a literal and implicit belief of the divine inſpiration of all the books of the Old Teſtament; and conſequently of all the hiſtory, chronology, geography, and philoſophy contained in them; becauſe to theſe the Jews, who rejected it, adhered with the moſt ſuperſtitious exactneſs: it could not be the ſame kind of belief in the writings of the New Teſtament, becauſe theſe in his life-time had no exiſtence; much leſs could it conſiſt in a blind aſſent to the numberleſs explanations of theſe books, and leaſt of all in the belief of creeds, articles, and theological ſyſtems founded on ſuch explanations; for all theſe were the productions of later ages. It muſt therefore have been this, and this alone; a ſincere belief in the divine authority of his miſſion, and a conſtant practice of all moral duties from a ſenſe of their being agreeable to his commands.

guage,

guage, charity to all men; the other, in the probation of man, and his obedience to his Creator. Sublime and magnificent as was the philoſophy of the ancients, all their moral ſyſtems were deficient in theſe two important articles. They were all built on the ſandy foundations of the innate beauty of virtue, or enthuſiaſtic patriotiſm; and their great point in view was the contemptible reward of human glory; foundations which were by no means able to ſupport the magnificent ſtructures which they erected upon them; for the beauty of virtue, independent of its effects, is unmeaning nonſenſe; patriotiſm, which injures mankind in general for the ſake of a particular country, is but a more extended ſelfiſhneſs, and really criminal; and all human glory but a mean and ridiculous deluſion. The whole affair then of religion and morality, the ſubject of ſo many thouſand volumes, is in ſhort no more than this: the Supreme Being, infinitely good as well as powerful, deſirous to diffuſe happineſs by all poſſible means, has created innumerable

merable ranks and orders of beings, all ſubſervient to each other by proper ſubordination. One of theſe is occupied by man, a creature endued with ſuch a certain degree of knowledge, reaſon, and free-will, as is ſuitable to his ſituation, and placed for a time on this globe as in a ſchool of probation and education. Here he has an opportunity given him of improving or debaſing his nature, in ſuch a manner as to render himſelf fit for a rank of higher perfection and happineſs, or to degrade himſelf to a ſtate of greater imperfection and miſery; neceſſary indeed towards carrying on the buſineſs of the univerſe, but very grievous and burthenſome to thoſe individuals, who, by their own miſconduct, are obliged to ſubmit to it. The teſt of this his behaviour, is doing good, that is, co-operating with his Creator, as far as his narrow ſphere of action will permit, in the production of happineſs. And thus the happineſs and miſery of a future ſtate will be the juſt reward or puniſhment of promoting or preventing happineſs

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in this. So artificially by this means is the nature of all human virtue and vice contrived, that their rewards and puniſhments are woven as it were into their very eſſence; their immediate effects give us a foretaſte of their future; and their fruits in the preſent life are the proper ſamples of what they muſt unavoidably produce in another. We have reaſon given us to diſtinguiſh theſe conſequences, and regulate our conduct; and leſt that ſhould neglect its poſt, conſcience is alſo appointed as an inſtinctive kind of monitor, perpetually to remind us both of our intereſt and our duty.

When we conſider how wonderfully the practice of virtue is thus enforced by our great Creator, and that all which he requires of us under that title is only to be happy, that is, to make each other ſo; and when at the ſame time we look round us, and ſee the whole race of mankind, through every ſucceſſive generation, tormenting, injuring, and deſtroying each other, and perpetually counteracting the gracious deſigns of their maker,

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it is a moſt aſtoniſhing paradox how all this comes to paſs; why God ſhould ſuffer himſelf to be thus defeated in his beſt purpoſes by creatures of his own making; or why man ſhould be made with diſpoſitions to defeat them at the expence of his own preſent and future happineſs; why infinite goodneſs ſhould form creatures inclined to oppoſe its own benevolent deſigns, or why infinite power ſhould thus ſuffer itſelf to be oppoſed.

There are ſome, I know, who extricate themſelves from this difficulty very conciſely by aſſerting, that there is in fact no ſuch original depravity, no ſuch innate propenſity to vice in human nature; but as this aſſertion is directly contrary to the expreſs declaration of the ſcriptures, to the opinion of the philoſophers and moraliſts of all ages, and to the moſt conſtant and unvariable experience of every hour, I think they no more deſerve an anſwer, than they who would affirm, that a ſtone has no tendency to the center by its natural

natural gravity, or that flame has no inclination to aſcend.

But the uſual ſolution applied to this difficulty by the ableſt philoſophers and divines, with which they themſelves, and moſt of their readers, ſeem perfectly ſatisfied, is comprehended in the following reaſoning: That man came perfect out of the hands of his Creator, both in virtue and happineſs; but it being more eligible that he ſhould be a free agent than a mere machine, God endued him with freedom of will; from the abuſe of which freedom, all miſery and ſin, that is, all natural and moral evils, derive their exiſtence; from all ſuch therefore the divine goodneſs is ſufficiently juſtified, by reaſon they could not be prevented without the loſs of ſuperior good; for to create men free, and at the ſame time compel them to be virtuous, is utterly impoſſible.

But whatever air of demonſtration this argument may aſſume, by whatever famed preachers it may have been uſed, or by whatever

whatever learned audiences it may have been approved, I will venture to affirm, that it is falſe in all its principles, and in its concluſion alſo; and I think it may be clearly ſhewn, that God did not make man abſolutely perfect, nor abſolutely free: nor, if he had, would this in the leaſt have juſtified the introduction of wickedneſs and miſery.

That man came perfect, that is, endued with all poſſible perfections, out of the hands of his Creator, is evidently a falſe notion derived from the philoſophers of the firſt ages, founded on their ignorance of the origin of evil, and inability to account for it on any other hypotheſis: they underſtood not that the univerſal ſyſtem required ſubordination, and conſequently comparative imperfections; nor that in the ſcale of beings there muſt be ſomewhere ſuch a creature as man with all his infirmities about him; that the total removal of theſe would be altering his very nature; and that as ſoon as he became perfect he muſt ceaſe to be man. The truth of this, I think, has been ſufficiently

ſufficiently proved; and beſides, the very ſuppoſition of a being originally perfect, and yet capable of rendering itſelf wicked and miſerable, is undoubtedly a contradiction, that very power being the higheſt imperfection imaginable.

That God made man perfectly free is no leſs falſe: men have certainly ſuch a degree of free-will as to make them accountable, and juſtly puniſhable for the abuſe of it; but abſolute and independent free-will is what, I believe, no created being can be poſſeſſed of. Our actions proceed from our wills, but our wills muſt be derived from the natural diſpoſitions implanted in us by the author of our being: wrong elections proceed from wrong apprehenſions or unruly paſſions; and theſe from our original frame or accidental education; theſe muſt determine all our actions, for we have no power to act differently, theſe previous circumſtances continuing exactly the ſame. Had God thought proper to have made all men with the ſame heads and the ſame hearts, which

which he has given to the moſt virtuous of the ſpecies, they would all have excelled in the ſame virtues: or had the bias implanted in human nature drawn as ſtrongly towards the good ſide, as it now apparently does towards the bad, it would have operated as ſucceſsfully, and with as little infringement on human liberty: men, as well as all other animals, are exactly fitted for the purpoſes they are deſigned for; and have inclinations and diſpoſitions given them accordingly: He who implanted patience in the lamb, obedience in the horſe, fidelity in the dog, and innocence in the dove, might as eaſily have inſpired the breaſt of man with theſe and all other virtues; and then his actions would have certainly correſponded with his formation: therefore, in the ſtrict philoſophical ſenſe, we have certainly no free-will; that is, none independent of our frame, our natures, and the author of them.

But were both theſe propoſitions true, were men originally created both perfect and free, yet this would by no means juſtify the

introduction of moral evil; becauſe, if his perfection was immediately to be deſtroyed by his free-will, he might as well never have been poſſeſt of the one, and much better have been prevented from making uſe of the other: let us diſpute therefore as long as we pleaſe, it muſt eternally be the ſame thing, whether a Creator of infinite power and knowledge, created beings originally wicked and miſerable, or gave them a power to make themſelves ſo, fore-knowing they would employ that power to their own deſtruction.

If moral evil, therefore, cannot be derived from the abuſe of free-will in man, from whence can we trace its origin? Can it proceed from a juſt, a wiſe, and a benevolent God? Can ſuch a God form creatures with diſpoſitions to do evil, and then puniſh them for acting in conformity to thoſe evil diſpoſitions? Strange and aſtoniſhing indeed muſt this appear to us, who know ſo little of the univerſal plan! but it is far, I think, from being irreconcileable with the

juſtice

juſtice of the Supreme diſpoſer of all things: for let us but once acknowledge the truth of our firſt great propoſition, (and moſt certainly true it is) that natural evils exiſt from ſome neceſſity in the nature of things, which no power can diſpenſe with or prevent, the expediency of moral evil will, perhaps, follow on courſe: for if miſery could not be excluded from the works of a benevolent Creator by infinite power, theſe miſeries muſt be endured by ſome creatures or other for the good of the whole: and if there were none capable of wickedneſs, then they muſt fall to the ſhare of thoſe who are perfectly innocent. Here again we ſee our difficulties ariſe from our wrong notions of omnipotence, and forgetting how many difficulties it has to contend with: in the preſent inſtance it is obliged either to afflict innocence, or be the cauſe of wickedneſs; it has plainly no other option: what then could infinite wiſdom, juſtice, and goodneſs do in this ſituation more conſiſtent with itſelf, than to call into being creatures formed with ſuch depravity,

in their diſpoſitions, as to induce many of them to act in ſuch a manner as to render themſelves proper ſubjects for ſuch neceſſary ſufferings, and yet at the ſame time endued with ſuch a degree * of reaſon and

* Some have aſſerted that there can be no degrees of free-will, but that every being muſt be abſolutely free, or poſſeſſed of no freedom at all: and this ſeems to have been the principal error that has led thoſe who have ſupported both ſides of this queſtion into ſo many abſurdities; as it well might, ſince they were both equally wrong in eſpouſing a propoſition, which contradicts both reaſon and experience. Brutes have a certain degree of free-will; elſe why do we correct them for their miſbehaviour, or why do they amend upon correction? Yet certainly they have not ſo great a degree as ourſelves. A man raving mad is not, nor is conſidered as a free-agent; a man leſs mad has a greater portion of freedom; and a man not mad at all has the greateſt; but ſtill the degree of his freedom muſt bear a proportion to the weakneſs of his underſtanding, and the ſtrength of his paſſions and prejudices; all which are a perverſion of reaſon, and madneſs as far as they extend, and operate on free-will in the very ſame manner: ſo that it is ſo far from being true, that all men are equally free, that probably there are no two men who are poſſeſſed of exactly the ſame degree of freedom.

free-will

free-will as to put it in the power of every individual to eſcape them by their good behaviour? ſuch a creature is man; ſo corrupt, baſe, cruel, and wicked, as to convert theſe unavoidable miſeries into juſt puniſhments, and at the ſame time ſo ſenſible of his own depravity and the fatal conſequences of guilt, as to be well able to correct the one, and to avoid the other. Here we ſee a ſubſtantial reaſon for the depravity of man, and the admittance of moral evil in theſe circumſtances ſeems not only compatible with the juſtice of God, but one of the higheſt inſtances of his conſummate wiſdom in ordering and diſpoſing all things in the beſt manner their imperfect natures will admit.

I preſume not by what has been here ſaid to determine on the counſels of the Almight, to triumph in the compleat diſcovery of the origin of moral evil, or to aſſert that this is the certain or ſole cauſe of its exiſtence; I propoſe it only as a gueſs concerning the reaſon of its admiſſion, more probable, and leſs derogatory from the di-

vine wiſdom and juſtice, than any that has hitherto been offered for that purpoſe.

There is undoubtedly ſomething farther in the general depravity of mankind than we are aware of, and probably many great and wiſe ends are anſwered by it to us totally incomprehenſible. God, as has been ſhewn, would never have permitted the exiſtence of natural evil, but from the impoſſibility of preventing it without the loſs of ſuperior good; and on the ſame principle the admiſſion of moral evil is equally conſiſtent with the divine goodneſs: and who is he ſo knowing in the whole ſtupendous ſyſtem of nature as to aſſert, that the wickedneſs of ſome beings may not, by means unconceivable to us, be beneficial to innumerable unknown orders of others? or that the puniſhments of ſome may not contribute to the felicity of numbers infinitely ſuperior?

To this purpoſe the learned Hugenius ſays with great ſagacity, *Præterea credibile eſt, ipſa illa animi vitia magnæ hominum parti, non ſine ſummo conſilio data eſſe: Cum enim*

Dei

Dei providentiâ talis ſit Tellus, ejuſque incolæ, quales cernimus, abſurdum enim foret exiſtimare omnia hæc alia facta eſſe, quam ille voluerit, ſciveritque futura *.

But let us not forget that this neceſſity of vice and puniſhment, and its ſubſerviency to public good, makes no alteration in their natures with regard to man; for though the wiſdom of God may extract from the wickedneſs of men ſome remote benefits to the univerſe; yet that alters not the caſe with regard to them, nor in the leaſt extenuates their guilt. He has given them reaſon ſufficient to inform them, that their injuries to each other are diſpleaſing to him, and free-will ſufficient to refrain from ſuch actions, and may therefore puniſh their diſobedience without any infringement of juſtice: he knows indeed, that though none are under any compulſion to do evil, yet that they are all ſo framed, that many will certainly do it; and he knows alſo that incomprehenſible ſe-

* Coſmotheoros, Lib. 1. p. 34.

cret why it is neceſſary that many ſhould: but his knowledge having no relation to their determinations renders not their vices leſs criminal, nor the puniſhment of them leſs equitable: for though with regard to God, vice may be perhaps the conſequence of miſery; that is, men may be inclined to vice in order to render them proper objects of ſuch a degree of miſery as was unavoidably neceſſary, and previouſly determined for the ſake of public good, yet, in regard to man, miſery is the conſequence of vice; that is, all human vices produce miſery, and are juſtly puniſhed by its infliction.

If it be objected, that this makes God the author of ſin, I anſwer, God is, and muſt be the author of every thing; and to ſay that any thing is, or happens, independent of the firſt cauſe, is to ſay that ſomething exiſts, or happens, without any cauſe at all. God is the author, if it may be ſo expreſſed, of all the natural evils in the univerſe; that is, of the feweſt poſſible in the nature of things; and why may he not be the author of all moral

moral evil in the ſame manner, and on the ſame principle? If natural evil owes its exiſtence to neceſſity, why may not moral? If miſery brings with it its utility, why may not wickedneſs?

" If ſtorms and earthquakes break not Heav'n's deſign,
" Why then a Borgia or a Cataline?"

Wherefore it ought always to be conſidered, that, though ſin in us, who ſee no farther than the evils it produces, is evil, and juſtly puniſhable; yet in God, who ſees the cauſes and connections of all things, and the neceſſity of its admiſſion, that admiſſion may be no evil at all, and that neceſſity a ſufficient vindication of his goodneſs.

But it may be alledged that this principle totally changes the nature of vice, deſtroys the criterion before affixed to it, and encourages the univerſal practice of wickedneſs: for if moral evil, and the puniſhment of it, are neceſſary towards promoting univerſal good,

good, then the more wicked men are, the more they promote that good; and the more they co-operate with their Creator in compleating his great and benevolent plan of univerſal happineſs. But this reaſoning is extremely fallacious; becauſe no collateral, remote, unknown, and undeſigned good reſulting from vice can alter the nature of it, or diveſt it of criminality; and moreover if that good ariſes only from its puniſhment, ſo far is it from an encouragement to wickedneſs, that it proves only that the puniſhment of it is neceſſary and unpreventable; nay in its nature incapable of remiſſion, without a penal ſatisfaction from ſome being or other; nor does its co-operation with the deſigns of Providence render it leſs criminal, or leſs worthy of his juſt indignation: all hiſtories are filled with inſtances of the wickedneſs of men conſpiring to bring about the counſels of the Almighty; ſuch were the ambition and ferocity of the Romans, the obſtinacy of the Jews, the cruelty

of Herod, and the treachery of Judas; yet were theſe never eſteemed for that reaſon meritorious or innocent.

From this important propoſition, that all natural evil derives its exiſtence from neceſſity, and all moral from expediency ariſing from that neceſſity; I ſay, from this important propoſition, well conſidered and purſued, ſuch new lights might be ſtruck out as could not fail, if directed by the hands of learning and impartiality, to lead the human mind through the unknown regions of ſpeculation, and to produce the moſt ſurpriſing and uſeful diſcoveries in ethics, metaphyſics, and in chriſtianity too: I add chriſtianity, becauſe it is a maſter-key, which will, I am certain, at once unlock all the myſterious and perplexing doctrines of that amazing inſtitution, and explain fairly, without the leaſt aſſiſtance from theological artifice, all thoſe abſtruſe ſpeculations of original ſin, grace, and predeſtination, and vicarious puniſhments, which the moſt learned, for want of this

this clue, have never yet been able to make conſiſtent with reaſon or common ſenſe.'

In the firſt place, for inſtance, the doctrine* of original ſin is really nothing more than the very ſyſtem here laid down, into which we have been led by cloſely purſuing reaſon, and without which the origin of moral evil cannot be accounted for on any principle whatever. Indeed, according to the common notions of the abſolute omnipotence of God, and the abſolute free-will in man, it is moſt abſurd and impious, as it repreſents the Deity voluntarily bringing men into being with depraved diſpoſitions, tending to no good purpoſes, and then arbitrarily puniſhing them for the ſins which they occaſion with torments which anſwer no

* Original ſin is a contradiction in terms; original ſignifying innate, and ſin the act of an accountable being: by this expreſſion, therefore, of original ſin cannot be meant original or innate guilt, for that is abſolute nonſenſe, but only an original depravity, or an innate diſpoſition to ſin.

ends,

Johnson makes a remark on these letters which is especially applicable here: "I am doubtful whether those who stand highest in the scale of being, speak so confidently of the dispensations of their maker." "For fools rush in, where angels fear to tread."

ends, either of their reformation or utility to the universe: but when we see, by the foregoing explanation, the difficulties with which Omnipotence was environed, and that it was obliged by the necessity of natural evils to admit moral, all these absurdities at once vanish, and the original depravity of man appears fairly consistent with the justice and even goodness of his Creator.

The doctrines of predestination and grace as set forth in the scriptures, on the most impartial interpretation, I take to be these: that some men come into the world with dispositions so extremely bad, that God foreknows that they will certainly be guilty of many crimes, and in consequence be punished for them; that to others he has given better dispositions, and moreover protects them from vice by a powerful but invisible influence, in the language of those writings called grace: this scheme has appeared to many so partial and unjust, that they have totally rejected it, and endeavoured, by forced interpretations, to explain it quite

out

out of the bible, in contradiction to all the ſenſe of language, and the whole tenour of thoſe writings: and indeed, on the old plan of God's abſolute omnipotence, uncontrouled by any previous neceſſity, in the nature of things, to admit both natural and moral evil, it is highly derogatory from his wiſdom and goodneſs; but, on the ſuppoſition of that previous neceſſity, there appears nothing incredible in it, nor the leaſt inconſiſtent with divine juſtice; becauſe if God was obliged by the nature of things, and for the good of the whole, to ſuffer ſome to be wicked, and conſequently miſerable, he certainly might protect others both from guilt and puniſhment. He in this light may be compared to the commander of a numerous army, who, though he is obliged to expoſe many to danger, and ſome to deſtruction, yet protects others with ramparts and covert-ways; but ſo long as he exerciſes this power for the good of the whole, theſe diſtinctions amongſt individuals ought never to be imputed to partiality or injuſtice.

The

The doctrine * of ſacrifice, or vicarious puniſhment, is the moſt univerſal, and yet, excluſive of this plan, the moſt abſurd of all religious tenets that ever entered into the mind of man; ſo abſurd is it, that how it came to be ſo univerſal is not eaſy to be accounted for: Pagans, Jews, and Chriſtians, have all agreed in this one point, though differing in all others; and have all treated it as a ſelf-evident principle, that the ſins of one creature might be atoned for by the ſufferings of another: but from whence they derived this ſtrange opinion, none of them have pretended to give any account, or to produce in its defence the leaſt ſhadow of a reaſon; for that there ſhould be any manner of connection between the miſeries of one being

* If the puniſhments of the wicked ſerve not ſome ends with which we are unacquainted, the ſufferings of the innocent can poſſibly bear no manner of relation to them; and conſequently the words Sacrifice, Atonement, Propitiation, and Vicarious Puniſhments, can no more have any ideas affixed to them than the ringing of a bell or the blowing of a trumpet, but are mere ſounds, without any meaning at all.

being and the guilt of another; or that the puniſhing the innocent, and excuſing the guilty, ſhould be a mark of God's deteſtation of ſin; or, that two acts of the higheſt injuſtice ſhould make one of juſtice, is ſo fundamentally wrong, ſo diametrically oppoſite to common ſenſe, and all our ideas of juſtice, that it is equally aſtoniſhing that ſo many ſhould believe it themſelves or impoſe it upon others. But on the foregoing theory this alſo may be a little cleared up, and will by no means appear ſo very inconſiſtent with reaſon: for if a certain quantity of miſery in ſome part of the univerſal ſyſtem is neceſſary to the happineſs and well-being of the whole; and if this neceſſity ariſes from its anſwering ſome purpoſes incomprehenſible to the human underſtanding; I will aſk any impartial reaſoner, why the ſufferings of one being may not anſwer the ſame ends, or be as effectual towards promoting univerſal good, as the ſufferings of another? If the miſeries of individuals are to be looked upon as taxes which they are obliged to pay towards

towards the ſupport of the public, why may not the ſufferings of one creature ſerve the ſame purpoſes, or abſolve as much of that neceſſary tax, as the ſufferings of another, and on that account be accepted as a payment or ſatisfaction for their ſufferings; that is, for the ſufferings due to the public utility from the puniſhment of their crimes, without which the happineſs of the whole could not ſubſiſt, unleſs they ſhould be replaced by the ſufferings of others? As we are entirely ignorant why miſery has any exiſtence at all, or what intereſt it ſerves in the general ſyſtem of things, this may poſſibly be the caſe, for any thing we know; and that it is not, I am certain no one can affirm with reaſon: reaſon indeed cannot inform us that it is ſo, but that it may be, is undoubtedly no contradiction to reaſon.

If I miſtake not, it might be ſhewn, that this principle of the neceſſity of moral evil, and its puniſhment, is the foundation on which the whole fabric of the chriſtian diſpenſation is erected; the principle itſelf is avowed by the author of that diſpenſation in

clear and expreſs words: *It muſt needs be,* ſays he, *that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh.* That is, it is neceſſary towards compleating the deſigns of providence, that ſome men ſhould commit crimes; but as no individual is compelled by neceſſity to commit them, woe unto all who are thus guilty. He came, by his excellent precepts and example, to diminiſh the quantity of moral evil in the world, and of miſery conſequential from its puniſhment, but found it neceſſary to replace that miſery in ſome degree by his own voluntary and unmerited ſufferings; and perhaps the unparalleled tortures inflicted on his diſciples and followers might be alſo neceſſary and ſubſervient to the ſame purpoſes.

From what has been here ſaid, I think it is evident that the origin of evil is by no means ſo difficult to account for as at firſt ſight it appears; for it has been plainly ſhewn that moſt of thoſe we uſually complain of are evils of imperfection, which are rather the abſence of comparative advantages than poſitive

poſitive evils, and therefore, properly ſpeaking, no evils at all; and as ſuch, ought to be entirely ſtruck out of the catalogue. It has likewiſe been made appear, that of natural evils, which are the ſufferings of ſenſitive beings, many are but the conſequences naturally reſulting from the particular circumſtances of particular ranks in the ſcale of exiſtence, which could not have been omitted without the deſtruction of the whole; and that many more are in all probability neceſſary, by means to us incomprehenſible, to the production of univerſal good. Laſtly, it has been ſuggeſted, that from this neceſſity of natural evils, may ariſe the expediency of moral, without which thoſe neceſſary ſufferings muſt have been with leſs juſtice inflicted on perfect innocence; and moreover, that it is probable moral evil, as well as natural, may have ſome ultimate tendency to the good of the whole; and that the crimes and puniſhments of ſome beings may, by ſome means or other, totally beyond the

reach of our narrow capacities, contribute to the felicity of much greater numbers.

This plan, Sir, I am perſuaded is not far diſtant from the truth; and on this foundation, if I miſtake not, a ſyſtem of morality and religion, more compleat and ſolid, more conſiſtent with reaſon, and with chriſtianity too, might be erected than any which has yet appeared: I heartily wiſh that ſome perſon of more learning, abilities, and leiſure than myſelf, (and much more, I am ſure, of all it would require) encouraged by your favour, and aſſiſted by your ſagacity, would undertake it, and condeſcend to fill up theſe out-lines, ſo inaccurately ſketched out by,

SIR, &c.

LET-

LETTER V.

ON POLITICAL EVILS.

SIR,

ACCORDING to my propoſed plan there ſtill remain two ſorts of evils to be accounted for, political and religious; under which heads, (if you are not already tired with ſo abſtruſe and unentertaining a correſpondence) I ſhall endeavour to ſhew you, that it is utterly impoſſible, even for omnipotence itſelf, to give a perfect government, or a perfect religion to an imperfect creature; and therefore, that the numberleſs imperfections inherent in all human governments and religions are not imputable to God, nor any defect of power, wiſdom, or goodneſs in him; but only to the inferiority of man's ſtation in the univerſe, which neceſſarily expoſes him to natural and moral evils, and muſt, for the ſame reaſon, to po-

litical and religious; which are indeed but the conſequences of the other. Superior beings may probably form to themſelves, or receive from their Creator, government without tyranny or corruption, and religions without deluſions or abſurdities; but man cannot: God indeed may remove him into ſo exalted a ſociety; but whilſt he continues to be man, he muſt be ſubject to innumerable evils; amongſt which thoſe I call political and religious are far from being the leaſt.

But as theſe two kinds of evils are very different, they will require different conſiderations; I ſhall therefore in the preſent confine myſelf to the political only; by which I mean all thoſe grievous burthens of tyranny and oppreſſion, of violence and corruption, of war and deſolation, under which all ages and nations have ever groaned on account of government: little leſs deſtructive perhaps to the happineſs of mankind, than even anarchy itſelf; but which, notwithſtanding, are ſo woven into the very eſſence

eſſence of all human governments from the depravity of man, that without them none can be either eſtabliſhed, maintained, or adminiſtered, nor conſequently can they be prevented without changing that depravity into perfection; that is, without a compleat alteration in human nature. How this comes to paſs may be eaſily explained by a ſhort examination, firſt into the nature and origin of government in general, and afterwards into thoſe of particular forms and policies; than which nothing has been more commonly miſunderſtood and miſrepreſented.

As to government in general, it is no wonder that it is ſo productive of evil, ſince its very nature conſiſts of power truſted in the hands of ſuch imperfect and vicious creatures as men, and exerciſed over others as imperfect and vicious as themſelves; in which there muſt be pride, avarice, and cruelty on one ſide; envy, ignorance, and obſtinacy on the other; and injuſtice and ſelf-intereſt on both. Its origin alſo ariſes from the ſame impure ſource of human im-

perfection; that is, men being neither wiſe nor honeſt enough to purſue their common or mutual intereſts without compulſion, are obliged to ſubmit to ſome, in order to ſecure their lives and properties from the depredations of all: but though this neceſſity drives them into ſome kind of government, yet it can never decide who ſhall govern, becauſe all men being by nature equal, every one has an equal right to this ſuperiority: this, therefore, can be determined only by more imperfections; that is, by the ſtruggles of ambition, treachery, violence, and corruption; from ſucceſs in which univerſal ſcramble are derived all the mighty empires of the earth: one man at firſt, by ſome of theſe methods, acquiring the command over a few, then by their aid extending his power over greater numbers, and at laſt, by the aſſiſtance of thoſe numbers, united by the advantage of plundering others, ſubduing all oppoſition: and thus we ſee all human government is the offſpring of violence and corruption, and muſt inherit the imperfection of both its parents. It is plain alſo that national

national governments can never be ſupported by any other methods than thoſe by which they were at firſt raiſed; for, being all independent of each other, and retaining ſtill their original inclination to devour each other; and having no ſuperior tribunal to refer to for juſtice, they can have no means to ſecure their own poſſeſſions, or to repel their mutual encroachments, but by force, which is called the right of war; that is, the right of doing all the wrong that lies in their power; for war, however dignified with honours and encomiums by conquerors and their flatterers, is in fact nothing elſe but robbery and murder. Nations having no more right to plunder each other than pariſhes, nor men to kill one another in their political than in their private capacities.

If we look into the internal conſtitutions of all theſe governments, we ſhall find likewiſe, that they muſt be adminiſtered by the ſame violence and corruption to which they are indebted for their origin; that is, by hiring one part of the ſociety to force the other

other into ſubjection; and that none of them ever ſubſiſted any longer than whilſt the ſtronger part, not always the moſt numerous, found it for their advantage to keep the weaker in obedience; for it ſhould be ever remembered, as the fundamental of all politics, that men will never ſubmit to each other merely for the ſake of public utility *, too remote a benefit to make any impreſſion on the dull ſenſes of the multitude; but muſt be always beat or bribed into obedience. Higher orders of beings may ſubmit to each other on nobler motives, from their

* If any one is ſo ignorant of human nature, as to fancy that they will, let him make the experiment in a ſingle pariſh, and there, if without power or compulſion, intereſt or gratuity, ſolely by the ſtrength of reaſon, and motives of public advantage, he can perſuade the inhabitants to ſubmit to equal and neceſſary taxes, to repair roads, build bridges, incloſe commons, drain marſhes, employ their poor, or perform any works of general utility; if he can accompliſh this, let him retain his opinion; but if he finds it utterly impracticable, let him not expect that it can ever be done in a whole nation, in which there are ſo many more factions, intereſts, and abſurdities to contend with.

ſenſe

ſenſe of virtue or of univerſal benefit; but man can be governed by nothing but the fear of puniſhment or the hopes of reward; that is, by ſelf-intereſt, the great principle that operates in the political world in the ſame manner that attraction does in the natural, preſerving order and reſtraining every thing to its proper courſe by the continual endeavours of every individual to draw all power and property to himſelf *.

If we deſcend to the examination of particular forms of government, we ſhall ſee them all exactly correſpond with this general plan; we ſhall find that none of them owe their origin to patriarchal power, the divine right of princes, or the uninfluenced choice of the people; things which never exiſted but in the idle dreams of viſionary politicians; but all to the ſtruggles of ambition

* There is indeed one other method of government frequently made uſe of by the moſt illuſtrious princes and legiſlators, that is fraud: but, as this operates only by the appearance of ſelf-intereſt, it may properly be comprehended under that head.

and

and ſelf-intereſt, ſubſiding at laſt into ſome kind of policy; either into abſolute monarchy, or ſome ſpecies of popular government more or leſs remote from it, as the different parts of it have had ſtrength or fortune to prevail; all which muſt be carried on by the ſame vicious methods of violence or corruption, and conſequently be productive of numberleſs, if not of equal, evils.

In abſolute monarchies, for inſtance, great violence muſt be exerciſed to keep men, by nature equal, in ſo unnatural a ſubjection; this muſt produce plots, rebellions, civil wars, and maſſacres; and theſe muſt require more violence to repreſs them; but this violence cannot be uſed without much corruption; for it is not the perſon of the ſovereign, his crown and ſcepter, that can preſerve his authority, nor can he deſtroy thouſands with his own hand, like a hero in a romance; a powerful army muſt be kept in pay to enſlave the people, and a numerous

merous clergy to deceive them*; whoſe ambition, avarice, luxury, and cruelty muſt be ſatiated with the blood and treaſures of that very people as a reward for their ſervices: hence infinite evils muſt ariſe, the lives, liberties, and properties of all muſt be dependent on the capricious will of one, or what is worſe, on the wills of his pimps, flatterers, and favourites: juſtice muſt be perverted by favour, and that favour can ſeldom be obtained but by adulation, ſervility, and treachery; this produces all kinds of moral evils, and theſe beget more political.

In democratical governments, if there is leſs violence there is more corruption; which in theſe indeed is the baſis of all power, and

* It has been repreſented as if the author by this deſigned to inſinuate, that the whole buſineſs of the clergy was to deceive the people; than which nothing can be more diſtant from his intentions: all that he means is, that men will not eaſily ſubmit to tyranny unleſs their conſciences are firſt enſlaved; or that popery is the moſt effectual ſupport of arbitrary power: a propoſition which he ſuppoſes no one will preſume to contradict.

productive

alive by the oppoſite effects of contrary poiſons: a very precarious and uneaſy kind of exiſtence! This expoſes them in ſome meaſure to all the evils incident to both abſolute and popular governments, though in a leſs degree; to the oppreſſion of the one, and the licentiouſneſs of the other, to factions at home, weakneſs abroad, and infinite expence in all parts of their adminiſtration: yet are theſe mixed conſtitutions the very beſt that human wiſdom could ever diſcover for the regulation of human ſocieties.

All theſe evils ariſe from the nature of things and the nature of man, and not from the weakneſs or wickedneſs of particular men, or their accidental aſcendency in particular governments: the degrees of them may indeed be owing to theſe, but their exiſtence is immutable. So long as the imperfection of human nature continues, ſo long will princes, for the moſt part, convert that power with which they are truſted for the ſake of public utility, to the ignoble ends of their own avarice, luxury, or ambition; ſo

ſo long will the people prefer preſent ſelf-intereſt to remote benefits ariſing from national proſperity; and ſo long will corrupt miniſters employ this popular venality to their own private advantage; and how many ſoever are lopt off,

Non deficit aureus alter.

It is the miſapprehenſion of this, that is the fundamental error of all ignorant, but well-meaning ſpeculative politicians *, of all others the moſt untractable in government, and

* It is a ſtrange, but a certain truth, that in politics moſt principles ſpeculatively right are practically wrong: to give a few inſtances of this kind out of many commonly adopted; viz. that thoſe who are poſſeſt of moſt property will fight beſt in its defence; that national buſineſs is moſt ſucceſsfully carried on by aſſemblies of men uninfluenced and unconnected; that unbounded liberty, civil and eccleſiaſtical, is moſt conducive to public happineſs and virtue: all theſe propoſitions have reaſon on their ſide, but experience againſt them; they all captivate vulgar minds, becauſe they look like truth; and they look like truth, becauſe they would be true if mankind in general

and miſchievous in buſineſs, the engines with which knaves work, and the ladders on which they mount to preferment; who endeavour to deſtroy all governments, becauſe they are not perfect; and oppoſe all adminiſtrations, becauſe they cannot govern men by ſuch means as they are not deſigned or formed to be governed by; who, by a Syſiphæan kind of politics, are ever labouring to roll up a ſtone that muſt recoil upon them; and to render that faultleſs, which infinite power and wiſdom cannot exempt from inconveniences, abuſes, and imperfections.

Should one enumerate all of this kind, which cannot be excluded from government without the total alteration of human nature, they would be endleſs; to inſtance but a few: all political bodies, like the natural, muſt have the ſeeds of their own diſſolution ſown in their very eſſence, and like them be

acted upon honeſt or even upon rational principles; but as in fact they do neither, they are utterly falſe, and all political ſtructures built on ſuch unſtable foundations will inevitably fall to the ground.

deſtroyed

deſtroyed by every exceſs; by exceſs of poverty or riches, of ſlavery or liberty, of ignorance or knowledge, of adverſity or proſperity; a ſtrong proof of their imperfection, that they cannot bear exceſs even of the greateſt good; and yet they cannot be formed of more durable materials, ſo long as they are conſtituted of human creatures. All power truſted in the hands of ſo imperfect a creature as man muſt be pernicious and oppreſſive; and yet ſomewhere ſuch power muſt be truſted. All human laws muſt be liable to miſconſtruction and uncertainty; yet without laws property cannot be ſecured. All popular elections muſt be attended with corruption, licentiouſneſs, and the perverſion of juſtice; yet without them the liberty of no country can be preſerved. All national proviſions for the poor muſt not only be encouragements to idleneſs, but productive of conteſts, and oftentimes of cruelty; yet without ſuch many honeſt but unfortunate people muſt inevitably periſh. All religious teſts and ſubſcriptions are in

their own natures ſubverſive of truth and morals; yet the folly of one part of mankind, and the knavery of the other, will ſcarcely permit any government to ſubſiſt without them. Trade and wealth are the ſtrength and the purſuit of every wiſe nation; yet theſe muſt certainly produce luxury, which no leſs certainly muſt produce their deſtruction. All war is a complication of all manner of evils natural and moral, that is, of miſery and wickedneſs; yet without it national contentions can never be determined. No government can be carried on, nor ſubordination preſerved, without forms and ceremonials, pomp and parade; yet all ſuch, from the inferiority of human nature giving itſelf airs of grandeur and magnificence, and the deſpicable expedients it is obliged to have recourſe to to ſupport it, muſt always have ſomething mean and ridiculous in them to exalted underſtandings. All governments are in a great meaſure upheld by abſurd notions infuſed into the minds of the people, of the divine right of ſome particular perſon

perſon or family to reign over them; a fooliſh partiality for ſome particular ſpot of ground; an outrageous zeal for ſome religion which they cannot underſtand, or a ſenſeleſs purſuit of glory which they can never attain: theſe are all falſe principles; yet without them, or ſome like them, no nation can long ſubſiſt: they can never be defended by reaſon, yet reaſon can produce no others that can ſupply their places. Every flouriſhing nation endeavours to improve arts, and cultivate reaſon and good ſenſe; yet, if theſe are extended too far, or too univerſally diffuſed, no national government or national religion can long ſtand their ground; for it is with old eſtabliſhments as with old houſes, their deformities are commonly their ſupports, and theſe can never be removed without endangering the whole fabric. In ſhort, no government can be adminiſtered without in ſome degree deceiving the people, oppreſſing the mean, indulging the great, corrupting the venal, oppoſing

factions to each other, and temporiſing with parties.

It is this neceſſity for evil in all government, which gives that weight and popularity, which uſually attends all thoſe who oppoſe and calumniate any government whatever; appearing always to have reaſon on their ſide, becauſe the evils of all power are conſpicuous to the meaneſt capacity; whereas the neceſſity for thoſe evils are perceivable only to ſuperior underſtandings. Every one can feel the burthen of taxes, and ſee the inconveniences of armies, places, and penſions, that muſt encreaſe them; but very few are able to comprehend, that no government can be ſupported without them in a certain degree; and that the more liberty any nation enjoys, the greater muſt be their number and neceſſity. The moſt ignorant can perceive the miſchiefs that muſt ariſe from corrupt miniſters and venal parliaments; but it requires ſome ſagacity to diſcern that aſſemblies of men unconnected by ſelf-intereſt,

reſt, will no more draw together in the buſineſs of the public, than horſes without harneſs or bridles; but like them, inſtead of being quietly guided in the right road of general utility, will immediately run riot, ſtop the wheels of government, and tear all the political machine to pieces.

From hence it comes to paſs that all ignorant wrongheaded people naturally run into oppoſition and faction, whilſt the wiſe man knows that theſe evils cannot be eradicated, and that their exceſs only can be prevented; that thus far every honeſt man will endeavour to his utmoſt, but to proceed farther only fools will hope for, or knaves pretend. He knows that numbers of men muſt always act in the ſame manner, if in the ſame circumſtances; that politics are a ſcience as reducible to certainty as mathematicks, and in them effects as invariably follow their cauſes; that the operations of will are as uniform as thoſe of matter and motion; and that though the actions of individuals are contingencies, thoſe of numbers are conſtant

and invariable; that, though a ſingle man may poſſibly prefer public utility to private advantage, it is utterly impoſſible, that the majority of numerous bodies ſhould be actuated by the ſame generous and patriotic principles *; theſe can ſpring only from virtue and wiſdom, benevolent hearts, and comprehenſive underſtandings; which, being the portion but of a few more exalted individuals, can never be found in the multitude to be

* This may be demonſtrated by a familiar inſtance: It is by no means uncommon for a ſingle die to come up a ſix, although the odds againſt it are five to one; but that a majority of five hundred dice ſhould at the ſame time come up ſix's is ſcarcely within the power of fortune; becauſe the odds againſt each individual become almoſt infinite when operating upon the whole five hundred together. For the ſame reaſon, ſuppoſing every ſixth man to be wiſe, honeſt, and public-ſpirited, which ſurely in any country is a very liberal allowance, there would not be the ſmalleſt probability that the majority of any five hundred to be choſen out of the whole, would be of that ſort, though elected with the utmoſt impartiality; but, if ambition, ſelf-intereſt, and corruption interfere in the choice, as they moſt infallibly will, theſe will render it totally impoſſible.

governed;

governed: nor can they be beſtowed in any extraordinary degree on thoſe who govern, who would thereby be rendered unfit for their occupations; ſtateſmen and miniſters, who muſt be hackneyed in the ways of men, cannot be made of ſuch pure and refined materials; peculiar muſt be the compoſition of that little creature called a *Great Man*. He muſt be formed of all kinds of contradictions: he muſt be indefatigable in buſineſs, to fit him for the labours of his ſtation, and at the ſame time fond of pleaſures, to enable him to attach many to his intereſts, by a participation of their vices: he muſt be maſter of much artifice and knavery, his ſituation requiring him to employ, and be employed by, ſo many knaves; yet he muſt have ſome honeſty, or thoſe very knaves will be unwilling to truſt him: he muſt be poſſeſſed of great magnanimity perpetually to confront ſurrounding enemies and impending dangers; yet of great meanneſs, to flatter thoſe enemies, and ſuffer tamely continual injuries and abuſes: he muſt be wiſe enough

enough to conduct the great affairs of mankind with ſagacity and ſucceſs, and to acquire riches and honours for his reward; and at the ſame time fooliſh enough to think it worth a wiſe man's while to meddle with ſuch affairs at all, and to accept of ſuch imaginary rewards for real ſufferings. Since then in all human governments ſuch muſt the governors, and ſuch the governed eternally be, it is certain they muſt be ever big with numberleſs imperfections, and productive of abundant evils: and it is no leſs plain, that if infinite goodneſs could not exclude natural and moral evils, infinite power can never prevent political.

I hope, Sir, the picture I have here drawn of human nature and human government, will not appear to you too much of the caricature kind: your experience in both muſt inform you that it is like, though your good nature may incline you to be ſorry that it is ſo. I truſt likewiſe to your good ſenſe to diſtinguiſh, that what has here been ſaid of their imperfections and abuſes, is by no means

means intended as a defence of them, but meant only to ſhew their neceſſity: to this every wiſe man ought quietly to ſubmit, endeavouring at the ſame time to redreſs them to the utmoſt of his power; which can be effected by one method only; that is, by a reformation of manners: for as all political evils derive their original from moral, theſe can never be removed, until thoſe are firſt amended. He, therefore, who ſtrictly adheres to virtue and ſobriety in his conduct, and enforces them by his example, does more real ſervice to a ſtate than he who diſplaces a bad miniſter, or dethrones a tyrant; this gives but a temporary relief, but that exterminates the cauſe of the diſeaſe. No immoral man then can poſſibly be a true patriot; and all thoſe who profeſs outrageous zeal for the liberty and proſperity of their country, and at the ſame time infringe her laws, affront her religion, and debauch her people, are but deſpicable quacks, by fraud or ignorance increaſing the diſorders they pretend to remedy:

as ſuch, I know, they have always appeared to your ſuperior judgment, and ſuch they are ever eſteemed by,

SIR, &c.

LET-

LETTER VI.

ON RELIGIOUS EVILS.

SIR,

I Now come to my laſt head of evils, which I call religious; by which I mean all that madneſs and folly, into which mankind have perpetually fallen under the name of religion; together with all thoſe perſecutions, maſſacres, and martyrdoms, which ſome have been induced to inflict, and others to ſuffer, from an enthuſiaſtic zeal for thoſe errors and abſurdities: evils of the moſt enormous ſize, and which of all others are the moſt difficult to be accounted for, as their exiſtence ſeems moſt inconſiſtent with infinite goodneſs, and moſt eaſily preventable by infinite power. For, though human nature could not be exempted from natural and moral evil (as has been ſhewn) even by omnipotence, yet, one would think a far leſs degree

degree of power might have been ſufficient to have defended it from religious; by imparting to mankind a true, rational, and explicit ſyſtem of theology and ethicks; by which means all the abſurdities of falſe religions, and all the calamities flowing from thoſe abſurdities, would have been effectually prevented. Wonderful, therefore, muſt it appear, ſince the happineſs of men, through every part of their exiſtence, ſo much depends on their religion, that is, on their entertaining right notions of God and his attributes, of their duty to him, and their behaviour to each other; moſt wonderful, I ſay, and aſtoniſhing it muſt appear, that a wiſe and benevolent Creator ſhould ſo far have deſerted his creatures on this important occaſion, as to have ſuffered them, through all generations, to have wandered amidſt ſuch perilous precipices in the dark; or if at any time he has vouchſafed them any ſupernatural light, that it ſhould have been ſo faint and glimmering that it has rather ſerved to terrify them with the gloomy pro-

ſpect of their danger, than to enable them to avoid it.

If we look back as far as hiſtory will carry us, we ſhall find all ages and nations practiſing, under the name of religion, ſuch inhuman, obſcene, ſtupid, and execrable idolatries, that it would diſgrace human nature but to enumerate them; we ſhall ſee the wiſeſt men of the wiſeſt countries conſulting oracles of wood and ſtone, and confiding in the fooliſh ſuperſtition of the flight of birds, the entrails of beaſts, and the pecking of chickens; we ſhall ſee them butchering their innocent herds and flocks as an atonement for their vices, and ſacrificing their enemies, their ſlaves, their children, and ſometimes themſelves, to appeaſe the wrath of their imaginary deities, of whoſe worſhip no cruelty was too horrid to be made a part; and by whoſe infamous examples no wickedneſs was too execrable to be patroniſed. At length chriſtianity appeared; a ſketch of morality the moſt rational, and of religion the moſt ſublime the world had ever ſeen; which, if ever God condeſcended

condeſcended to reveal his will to man, undoubtedly makes the faireſt pretenſions to be that revelation; and indeed, if we ſeriouſly conſider its internal excellence, the reaſonableneſs of its morality, the ſublimity of its theology, that it alone has fixed the right criterion of virtue, alone diſcovered the magnanimity of forgiveneſs; that its notions of the deity, his attributes and diſpenſations, are ſo unlike all that ever entered into the heads of the wiſeſt philoſophers of preceding ages, and yet ſo well confirmed by the learned diſcoveries of all ſucceeding times; ſo far exalted above all human reaſon, and yet ſo conſonant with it, and what is moſt concluſive, ſo infinitely above the capacities of thoſe who publiſhed them to the world; if we add to this its obſcure riſe and amazing progreſs, I think, we can ſcarcely doubt but that there muſt be ſomething ſupernatural in it: and yet, with all theſe marks of divinity ſtamped upon it, far from anſwering that idea of perfection which we might expect from the divine interpoſition, it was

but

but a ſketch, whoſe out-lines indeed appear the work of a conſummate maſter, but filled up from time to time by unequal and injudicious hands. It had many defects in its inſtitution, and was attended with many and great evils in its conſequences; in its inſtitution it wanted univerſality, authenticity *, perſpicuity †, and policy ‡, and in its conſequences

* By want of authenticity, is here meant only the want of that demonſtrable and infallible authority, of which all hiſtorical facts are in their own nature incapable; and which, had the friends of the chriſtian revelation never pretended to beſtow upon it, the truth of that event had been no more diſputed, than the truth of any other well-atteſted hiſtory whatſoever.

† The want of perſpicuity in this revelation, needs ſurely no other teſtimony than the millions of writers, who, for ſeventeen centuries, have laboured to demonſtrate, harmonize, ſyſtemiſe, illuſtrate, and explain every one of its doctrines; and the no leſs numberleſs and various opinions that remain to this day concerning them all: much indeed of this obſcurity has proceeded from men's endeavours to make it what they fancied it ſhould have been, but for which it was never intended; that is, a regular, clear, and explicit body of moral and political inſtitutes.

‡ By policy is here meant all inſtitutions and regu-

quences it was ſoon corrupted, and from that corruption productive of the moſt miſchievous effects. Its great author deſigned it not to be exempted from any of theſe imperfections. He revealed it only to a ſmall and obſcure corner of the world in parables and

lations of human government, both civil and eccleſiaſtical; concerning which the author of the chriſtian religion has carefully avoided giving any directions. All theſe he has left to be ordered by every ſtate in ſuch a manner as ſhall appear to them moſt convenient, and has commanded his diſciples to be ſubject, as men, to their ordinances, *not only for wrath, but for conſcience ſake*; but foreſeeing the infinite miſchiefs that muſt ariſe from truſting human creatures with a divine power, he has forbid them, as chriſtians, either to exerciſe, or ſubmit to, any authority over each other, under any pretence of its being derived from himſelf: *Ye know*, he ſays, *that the princes of the Gentiles exerciſe dominion over them, and they that are great exerciſe authority upon them; but it ſhall not be ſo among you, &c.* Matt. xx. 25. And perhaps there is no ſtronger proof of the divine wiſdom of this great inſtructor of mankind, than the extraordinary caution with which he has paſſed over a ſubject, on which no rules could be preſcribed not inconſiſtent either with practice or with virtue: and yet a ſubject which all other legiſlators have conſidered as their moſt important object.

myſteries;

myſteries; he guarded not its original purity, which ſeems to have died with himſelf, by committing it to any written records, but left it in the hands of illiterate men, who, though they were honeſt enough to die for it, were never wiſe enough perfectly to underſtand it. All policy he diſclaims in expreſs words, ſaying, *My kingdom is not of this world*; that is, I meddle not with the political affairs of mankind; I teach men to deſpiſe the world, but not to govern it. Nor did he expect any better conſequences from its progreſs than thoſe which actually followed; he was by no means ignorant of its future corruption, and that, though his primitive inſtitution breathed nothing but peace and forbearance, good-will and benevolence; yet that in mixing with the policies and intereſts of mankind, it would be productive of tyranny and oppreſſion, of martyrdoms and maſſacres, of national wars and family diſſentions. *Think not*, ſays he, *I come to ſend peace on earth, I come not to ſend peace but a ſword: for I am come to ſet a*

man at variance againſt his father, and the daughter againſt her mother, and the daughter-in-law againſt her mother-in-law. A prophecy too fatally fulfilled!

From what inſcrutable ſource can all theſe imperfections, and all theſe conſequent evils derive their exiſtence? On what incomprehenſible plan muſt the wiſe diſpoſer of all things proceed, to ſuffer men thus to bewilder themſelves in the labyrinths of error, and from thence to plunge into the gulphs of wickedneſs and miſery, when the leaſt direction from his omnipotent hand would lead them through the flowery paths of truth to virtue and felicity? Strange! that he has not given them reaſon ſufficient to perform this important office! Stranger! that, if ever he condeſcended to aſſiſt that reaſon with his infinite wiſdom, even the religion that reſults from that ſupernatural aſſiſtance, ſhould be ſtill deficient in almoſt every one of the principal requiſites neceſſary towards accompliſhing the great and beneficent ends it was deſigned for! that

it ſhould want univerſality to render it impartial, authenticity to make it demonſtrable, perſpicuity to make it intelligible, and policy to make it uſeful to mankind; that it ſhould immediately have been corrupted, and from that corruption been productive of all the miſery and wickedneſs it ſeemed calculated to prevent. But on examination we ſhall find, that theſe evils, like all thoſe of which we have before treated, owe their exiſtence to no defect of goodneſs or power in God, but to the imperfection of man, and their own neceſſity; that is, to the impracticability of giving a perfect religion to an imperfect creature: from whence this impracticability ariſes, I will endeavour to explain.

There are but two methods, that we know of, by which God can communicate a religion to mankind; that is, either by the deductions which he has impowered him to make by the force of that natural reaſon which he has implanted in him, or by the extraordinary interpoſition of divine revelation: now from the firſt of theſe little need

be ſaid to ſhew that nothing perfect can be expected: our reaſon is unſtable in its foundations, and uncertain in its concluſions; our lives are extremely ſhort, and our progreſs in ſcience no leſs tedious, and retarded by numberleſs obſtacles; much of our time is employed in getting ideas, and much in acquiring language to expreſs them; few men have capacities to reaſon, and fewer leiſure; ſome having ſenſe but no learning, want materials to work with; others having learning and no ſenſe, become more abſurd by having amaſſed much matter to miſtake about; ſo that to raiſe any tolerable ſyſtem of religion or morals, from human reaſon, requires the labours of many generations; from all which have already paſt how little truth can we collect? and yet, perhaps, much of that little is owing to revelation, which we are apt to think unneceſſary from the very aſſiſtance we have received from it; like the country-man who deſpiſed the ſun becauſe it ſhined in the day-time. We ſee but a very ſmall part of the great whole, and

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ſee that ſmall part ſo ſuperficially, that we comprehend not the eſſence of any thing; neither of body * or ſpirit, of ſpace † or time,

* Metaphyſicians divide all beings into ſpirit and matter: to ſpirit they attribute motion, activity, ſenſibility, thought, will, and reaſon, free from all ſolidity and extenſion; to matter they aſcribe ſolidity and extenſion only, void of all ſelf-motion, ſenſe, and perception; but theſe deſcriptions are quite arbitrary, founded only upon their own imaginations, and by no means conſiſtent with experience; for ſpirit ſeems to have many properties not ſo diſtinct from matter by its intimate union with it in the compoſition of all animals; and matter has certainly many qualities contradictory to this diſtinction, ſuch as coheſion, attraction, elaſticity, electricity, fermentation, heat, and vegetation, none of which can be accounted for from the mere paſſive principles of ſolidity and extenſion.

† Many philoſophers have conſidered time and ſpace as real eſſences; whereas they have certainly no more than an imaginary exiſtence, derived ſolely from the imperfection of human conceptions, and human language. They are in themſelves really nothing, and the attributes we beſtow upon them are applicable with equal propriety to nothing; that is, nothing

time, of infinity * or eternity; we know ſcarce any thing of any thing, and leaſt of all of the nature of God or ourſelves; and therefore it is by no means ſurpriſing that all religions derived from ſuch a ſource ſhould

has neither beginning nor end, nor can be comprehended within any bounds, The intervening period between hiſtorical facts we diſtinguiſh by the names of days and years; the diſtances between places we call yards and miles; and from this manner of expreſſing ourſelves they gain the appearance of being ſomething; whereas, abſtracted from thoſe facts and places, they are really nothing: ſo that if all things were annihilated, ſpace would immediately vaniſh, and, literally ſpeaking, *Time would be no more.*

* All the ideas we have of infinity and eternity are acquired by adding, in our imagination, miles to miles, and years to years, by which means we come never the nearer to them; for no addition of parts can ever make any thing infinite or eternal: no two objects can be placed at an infinite diſtance, becauſe they would then be the two ends of infinity; an infinite number is a contradiction in terms, and therefore every thing that is infinite or eternal muſt exiſt in ſome manner which bears no manner of relation to ſpace or time, and which muſt therefore be to us totally incomprehenſible.

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be full of errors and abſurdities. If it be aſſerted, that God might have given to man a more comprehenſive reaſon, and a greater inſight into nature and futurity; I anſwer, he certainly might, and he might alſo have given him the ſtrength of the horſe, and the ſwiftneſs of the ſtag, as well as the underſtanding of an angel; but then he had not continued to be man; or if he had, he would have ſuffered many ſuperior evils from theſe unhappy acquiſitions.

If we conſider the other method, by which God can communicate a religion to mankind, we ſhall find it no leſs incapable of producing a perfect one; becauſe though God is ſufficiently able to give a perfect religion, man is utterly unable to receive it. God cannot impart knowledge to creatures, of which he himſelf has made them incapable by their nature and formation; he cannot inſtruct a mole in aſtronomy, or an oyſter in muſic, becauſe he has not given them members, nor faculties neceſſary for the acquiſition of thoſe ſciences; neither is

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this any diminution of his omnipotence, becauſe acting in ſuch a manner would be willing contrarieties at the ſame time: it would be oppoſing his own deſigns, making creatures what they are not, and granting them powers which he thought proper to deny them; a revelation therefore from God can never be ſuch as we might expect from infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, but muſt condeſcend to the ignorance and infirmities of man. Was the wiſeſt legiſlator in the world to compoſe laws for a nurſery, they muſt be childiſh laws; ſo was God to reveal a religion to mankind, though the revealer was divine, the religion muſt be human, or it could be of no uſe to thoſe for whoſe ſake it was revealed; and therefore, like them, it muſt be liable to numberleſs imperfections, amongſt which all thoſe deficiences beforementioned are abſolutely unavoidable, and impoſſible to be prevented by any power whatever; theſe are the want of univerſality, authenticity, perſpicuity, and policy; its certain corruption, with all that inunda-

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tion of wickedneſs and miſery which muſt flow from that corruption. Great and numerous evils! from which it is not difficult to ſhew, that no revelation communicated to man can be exempted by an omnipotent revealer.

Firſt then it muſt want univerſality; that is, however conducive it may be to the virtue and happineſs of mankind in general, it cannot be alike communicated to all men in all ages and all nations of the world; becauſe, from the nature of things, it muſt have a being and a progreſſion; it muſt at firſt be revealed at ſome time and in ſome place; and whenever and wherever that is, there muſt have been times and places in which it was not revealed; and therefore it is impoſſible it can be univerſal: and this not proceeding from any impotence or partiality in the revealer, but from the modes of exiſtence of all human affairs.

It muſt likewiſe want authenticity, that is, though its divine authority may be more or leſs credible according to the circumſtances of

of the evidence, yet it can never be capable of a direct or demonstrative proof; because God must communicate this revelation to mankind either by a general or a particular inspiration; that is, either by inspiring all men, or by inspiring a few to teach it to others: the first of these methods, or an universal inspiration, is impossible in nature, and absurd even in imagination, and would be the total alteration of human nature: the other must ever be liable to infinite uncertainty; because, though a man may possibly know when he himself is inspired, (though that, I think, may be very well questioned) yet, that he should ever produce indubitable credentials of divine commission to others, who are uninspired, seems utterly impracticable, there being no marks by which the fact can be ascertained, nor any faculties in the human mind which are able to distinguish it: the excellence of the revelation he teaches, its beneficent ends, and the miracles he may work in its confirmation, may altogether render it more or less probable,

bable, but can never amount to a certain proof, becauſe we know ſo little of the ends and conſequences of things, and ſo much leſs of the nature of miracles: we underſtand indeed nothing about them, but that we ourſelves are unable to perform them; but what beings of ſuperior orders may be able to do we cannot tell; nor yet what power, inclination, or permiſſion ſuch beings may have to deceive us. If it is impoſſible, therefore, we can be certain of the divine authority of a revelation, even by a perſonal communication with its firſt author, much leſs can we be aſſured of it through the fallacious mediums of tradition or hiſtory; for whoever obſerves the propenſity men have to impoſe upon themſelves and others, how difficult it is to come at a true repreſentation of the commoneſt fact, even at the diſtance of a few miles, or a few years, will be eaſily convinced, that all human tradition can be nothing more than a complication of deſigned fraud and inevitable error; a glaſs which miſrepreſents all objects by magnifying or diminiſhing

diminiſhing them, juſt as it is placed by the hand of knavery for the inſpection of folly and credulity. Hiſtory, indeed, carries with it a greater authority, but muſt ever be liable to infinite imperfections: we can never be certain that the writers of it, being men, were not impoſed upon themſelves, or did not intend to impoſe on others; and therefore its original evidence cannot be concluſive, and muſt grow daily weaker in proportion to its antiquity; it muſt neceſſarily be ſubject to all uncertainties proceeding from the variation of languages and cuſtoms, ignorant tranſcribers, falſe tranſlations, interpolations, and forgeries; and as the hiſtories of religions are more connected with men's intereſts than thoſe of other occurrences, ſo they muſt be ever more ſubject to theſe frauds and impoſitions; for the ſame reaſon that a bank-note is more likely to be counterfeited than a news-paper. It is therefore impoſſible that hiſtory can afford us any certain proof of a ſupernatural and miraculous diſpenſation, becauſe a fact, unlikely to be

true, can never be demonſtrated by a relation not impoſſible to be falſe. If it be ſaid, that God may inſpire the writers of ſuch important records with infallibility; I anſwer, the proof that he has ſo inſpired them will be attended with no leſs difficulty than the proof of that divine authority which is to be eſtabliſhed by it; and it muſt ever be abſurd to prove the truth of a revelation by the infallibility of its records, and the infallibility of its records from the truth of the revelation. It is plain, therefore, that, though infinite goodneſs may reveal a religion to ſo imperfect a creature as man, yet infinite power cannot, by reaſon of that imperfection, give to that revelation ſuch a degree of authenticity, that is, ſuch a demonſtrable proof of its divine authority, as ſome men unreaſonably expect, and others as ridiculouſly beſtow upon it *.

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* Nothing here offered is meant by any means to invalidate the authority of revelation: that of the chriſtian is poſſeſſed of as much certainty as the nature

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It muſt want perſpicuity; that is, it muſt be much more obſcure, both in its ſpeculative and practical doctrines, than might be expected from the interpoſition of infinite wiſdom, truth, and benevolence. In its ſpeculative doctrines, obſcurity muſt be unavoidable, becauſe they muſt treat of ſubjects above the reach of our comprehenſions; which neither eye has ſeen, nor ear heard, nor has entered into the heart of man to conceive; and therefore no power can impart to us clear and explicit ideas of ſuch things, without firſt beſtowing on us new faculties and new ſenſes; that is, without the total alteration of our natures. But what is moſt of all extraordinary is, that it muſt be likewiſe to a certain degree obſcure in its practical and moral precepts; and this from a reaſon not the leſs valid for having never be-

of the fact, and the nature of its evidence will admit of. Thoſe who endeavour to beſtow more upon it, do in reality but make it leſs; and, like unſkilful architects, weaken a building already ſufficiently ſtrong, by overloading it with unneceſſary ſupporters.

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fore been inſiſted on; which is, from the neceſſity of moral evil; that is, ſince God, as has been ſhewn, was obliged by neceſſity to admit moral evil into the creation, he muſt probably be obliged, by the ſame neceſſity, to ſuffer it in ſome degree to continue; and therefore cannot enforce the univerſal practice of virtue by laws ſo explicit, by threats and promiſes ſo glaring, and by commands ſo inconteſtably of divine authority, as can admit of no doubt; for theſe would be ſo abſolutely irreſiſtible as at once to eradicate all human vice, which has already been proved to have been admitted only from the impoſſibility of its excluſion without the introduction of greater evils, or the loſs of ſuperior good. If omnipotence could not prevent the exiſtence of moral evil by the original formation of man, totally to extirpate it by revelation, would be to counteract his own wiſe, though incomprehenſible deſigns; and therefore a divine revelation can never be a regular body of practical inſtitutes, clear and perſpicuous, free from

all doubts and altercations, enforced by perpetual miracles, by viſible and immediate rewards and puniſhments; but a ſtill voice whiſpering gentle warnings, divine admonitions, and ſupernatural truths; a light ſhining in a dark place, illuminating to a certain degree the native obſcurity of the human mind, and diſcovering by faint glimmerings the deſigns of providence, and a diſtant proſpect of a future life.

It muſt alſo want policy; that is, it can never preſcribe political rules by which mankind can be conducted in the government of nations, or their pretended rights of war and peace, becauſe all theſe affairs being incapable (as has been ſhewn) of being carried on by any other means than thoſe of violence, fraud, and corruption; a divine revelation cannot poſſibly give any directions about them; becauſe all ſuch muſt be neceſſarily inconſiſtent either with virtue or with practicability; totally to forbid theſe methods of governing mankind, who can be governed by no other, would be deſtructive

tive of all government; to allow them, of all morality: and therefore it is neceſſary that men ſhould be left to act in theſe matters at their peril, as particular circumſtances may require, with only a general ſyſtem of religion and morality for their guide. If a divine revelation can give no laws for the management of civil government, much leſs can it inſtitute any new policies peculiar to itſelf, under the names of ſpiritual or eccleſiaſtical; all which, however divine in their original, muſt neceſſarily be adminiſtered, if adminiſtered by man, by the ſame unjuſtifiable methods as others; with this additional inconvenience, that they could never be juſtly reſiſted. God cannot, therefore, I apprehend, delegate ſpiritual power to man, without patroniſing all that violence, corruption, and iniquity, which muſt reſult from it, and without which no power in the hands of men can be exerciſed over men. For the imperfection of man is incompatible with the purity of a divine government. The government of all creatures muſt cor-

reſpond with their natures; and it ſeems to me as impoſſible that ſocieties of men ſhould ſubmit under a divine government, as that wolves and tygers ſhonld live together under the regulations of human policy; but moſt of all impoſſible it muſt be that a divine and human government ſhould ſubſiſt together in the ſame ſociety, for they muſt immediately claſh; and whenever that happens, the leaſt ſpark of divine authority, if really divine, muſt infallibly conſume all human power, and deſtroy all civil government whatever.

Laſtly, it muſt very ſoon be corrupted, and from that corruption be productive of the moſt miſchievous effects: for, as the pureſt ſtream poured into an impure veſſel, muſt partake of its impurity; ſo muſt the moſt perfect religion, that can be revealed by God to ſo imperfect a creature as man, partake of his imperfection, and produce many and great evils both natural and moral; that is, much of that miſery and wickedneſs which it was intended to prevent: this no

wiſdom can obviate, no power put a ſtop to, ſo long as that imperfection remains; but it muſt conſtantly come to paſs from a train of unavoidable conſequences, which muſt invariably follow their cauſes, ſo long as human nature continues what it is.

For inſtance, when a divine revelation is firſt communicated to mankind, it muſt be received (if received at all) becauſe its precepts are approved, and its authority believed; and all thoſe nations who thus approve the one, and believe the other, muſt eſteem it both their intereſt and their duty to encourage and ſupport it. This they can effect by no other means than by granting peculiar privileges to all who profeſs it, by forming from it their national religion, and public worſhip, and by maintaining an order of men to preach that religion, and miniſter that worſhip to the people; all which amounts to a national eſtabliſhment. Now the moment any religion becomes national, or eſtabliſhed, its purity muſt certainly be loſt, becauſe it is then impoſſible to

keep it unconnected with men's intereſts; and if connected, it muſt inevitably be perverted by them. Whenever temporal advantages are annexed to any religious profeſſion, they will be ſure to call in all thoſe who have no religion at all: knaves will embrace it for the ſake of intereſt, fools will follow them for the ſake of faſhion; and when once it is in ſuch hands, omnipotence itſelf can never preſerve its purity. That very order of men, who are maintained to ſupport its intereſts, will ſacrifice them to their own; and being in the ſole poſſeſſion of all its promiſes and all its terrors, and having the tenderneſs of childhood, the weakneſs of age, and the ignorance of the vulgar to work upon; I ſay, theſe men, veſted with all theſe powers, yet being but men, will not fail to convert all the mighty influence they muſt derive from them to the ſelfiſh ends of their own avarice and ambition, and conſequently to the total deſtruction of its original purity; from it they will lay claim to powers which it never deſigned

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them, and to poſſeſſions to which they have no right; to make good theſe falſe pretenſions, falſe hiſtories will be forged, and fabulous traditions invented; groundleſs terrors will be flung out to operate on ſuperſtition and timidity; creeds and articles will be contrived to confound all reaſon, and teſts impoſed to ſift out all who have honeſty or courage enough to reſiſt theſe unwarrantable encroachments. Devotion will be turned into farce and pageantry, to captivate men's eyes, that their pockets may with more facility be invaded: they will convert piety into ſuperſtition, zeal into rancour, and this religion, notwithſtanding all its divinity, into diabolical malevolence. By degrees knaves will join them, fools believe them, and cowards be afraid of them; and having gained ſo conſiderable a part of the world to their intereſts, they will erect an independent dominion among themſelves dangerous to the liberties of mankind, and repreſenting all thoſe who oppoſe their tyranny as God's enemies, teach it to be me-

ritorious in his ſight to perſecute them in this world, and damn them in another. Hence muſt ariſe hierarchies, inquiſitions, and popery; for popery is but the conſummation of that tyranny which every religious ſyſtem in the hands of men is in perpetual purſuit of, and whoſe principles they are all ready to adopt whenever they are fortunate enough to meet with its ſucceſs.

This tyranny cannot ſubſiſt without fierce and formidable oppoſition, from whence innumerable ſects, ſchiſms, and diſſenſions will lift up their contentious heads, each gaping for that very power which they are fighting to deſtroy, though unable either to acquire or retain it; and introductive only of their conſtant concomitants, ignorance, ſelf-conceit, ill-breeding, obſtinacy, anarchy, and confuſion. From theſe conteſts all kinds of evils muſt derive their exiſtence, blood-ſhed and deſolation, perſecutions, maſſacres and martyrdoms.

All theſe evils you ſee are but the neceſſary conſequences of the national eſtabliſh-

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ment of any religion which God can communicate to man, in whoſe hands its divinity can never long preſerve its purity, or keep it unmixed with his imperfections, his folly, and wickedneſs. Nay, ſo far is the divinity of a revelation from being able to prevent its corruption, that it will but increaſe and haſten it; for the greater ſhare of divinity it partakes, the greater muſt be its excellence; the greater its excellence, the more univerſal muſt be its approbation; the more it is approved, the more it muſt be encouraged; the more it is encouraged, the ſooner it will be eſtabliſhed; and the ſooner it is eſtabliſhed, the ſooner it muſt be corrupted and made ſubſervient to the worſt purpoſes of the worſt men; yet it is plain this eſtabliſhment is no more than the conſequence of its excellence, and men's approbation; no more than the alternative of its total extinction, and without which it cannot be preſerved at all; and therefore the corruption of every divine revelation communicated

municated to man, is, by the nature of man, clearly unavoidable.

From what has been here ſaid it appears plainly, that all the numerous evils which adhere to, and all the miſchievous effects which follow all human religions, whether natural or revealed, by no means owe their exiſtence to any want of power, wiſdom, or goodneſs in God, but, like all others, to the imperfection of man; that is, to his folly and wickedneſs, which muſt inevitably corrupt them. It is alſo, I think, no leſs evident that all arguments levelled againſt the divine original of chriſtianity, founded on its imperfections and pernicious conſequences, (which are all, I think, that have any weight) may be proved to be vain and inconcluſive; and this not by concealing or denying thoſe imperfections and pernicious conſequences, as many have abſurdly attempted, but by fairly ſhewing, that they all proceed from the imperfections of thoſe creatures to whom it is revealed; and that, ſo long as

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thoſe continue, theſe cannot be prevented by any wiſdom, goodneſs, or power whatever*.

Thus, Sir, if I miſtake not, I have ſufficiently, though conciſely, anſwered that moſt abſtruſe and important queſtion, *Whence came evil?* and proved, that all the evils we feel, and all which we ſee around us, derogate not in the leaſt from the wiſdom, power, or goodneſs of our Creator; but proceed entirely from that ſubordination which is ſo neceſſary to the happineſs, and even to the exiſtence of the great and incomprehenſible whole. I have ſhewn that all ſubordination muſt imply imperfection in ſome beings or other; and that all imperfection muſt con-

* If we look into the deiſtical writings of all times, we ſhall find, that they have always attacked the chriſtian religion moſt ſucceſsfully from this ground; they have ſhewed the many imperfections that adhere to it, and then concluded, that nothing imperfect could derive its original from God: their adverſaries have injudiciouſly denied thoſe imperfections, which for the moſt part are true, and agreed to their concluſion, which is indiſputably falſe; for ~~every thing~~ religion we poſſeſs is derived from God, and yet we poſſeſs ~~nothing endued~~ abſolute perfection.

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ſiſt in the abſence of comparative good, ~~or the admiſſion of poſitive~~ evil. I have ſhewn that moſt of the evils we uſually complain of are of the firſt kind; the want only of thoſe perfections we ſee others enjoy, or imagine infinite power might have beſtowed upon ourſelves; which are therefore in fact no evils at all: that thoſe of the latter ſort, or poſitive evils, are ſuch as from the nature of things muſt intrude themſelves into all creation, and therefore that omnipotence can do no more than make choice of that ſyſtem whch admits the feweſt; being obliged by the imperfection of all created beings, the untractableneſs of matter, and ſome incomprehenſible connection between good and evil, happineſs and miſery, to admit both, or to give exiſtence to neither. I have likewiſe ſhewn that moral evil may have its neceſſity and utility as well as natural; at leaſt, that if natural evils are neceſſary, moral ones are expedient, to prevent that neceſſary miſery from falling to the ſhare of perfect innocence, and to convert unavoidable ſuf-

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these are not convertible terms, in the sense which it is desired to give the word "evil"

ferings into juſt puniſhments; that though the eſſence of all moral evil conſiſts in the production of natural, yet it may have ſome collateral tendency to good; and that the wicked, whilſt they are juſtly puniſhed for the miſeries which they occaſion, may probably, by that very guilt and puniſhment, ſome way remotely contribute to univerſal happineſs. I have ſhewn that if natural and moral evils could not be prevented, the exiſtence of political and religious evils muſt of courſe be unavoidable, they being but the certain conſequences of the other: that all human government muſt be in the higheſt degree imperfect, and big with all manner of evils, being the dominion of ignorant and wicked creatures over each other; that, as ſuch creatures can be governed only by fear of puniſhment or hopes of reward, all government amongſt them muſt be founded on violence or corruption, and ever ſupported and adminiſtered by the ſame vicious and unjuſtifiable methods: that no power whatever can give a perfect religion to ſo imperfect

imperfect a creature as man, either by nature or revelation; not by nature, becauſe, whilſt that is human nature, he can never diſcover by reaſon the truths on which a perfect ſyſtem of theology or ethics can be erected; not by revelation, becauſe he wants faculties to comprehend ſuch ſupernatural diſcoveries, although they ſhould be imparted to him; that, was he capable of once receiving a perfect religion, it is not poſſible he could long retain it; becauſe, if it could be kept entirely ſeparate from his worldly intereſts, it would ſoon be neglected and periſh in oblivion; and, if it was not, ſuch a connection would quickly corrupt its purity, and deſtroy its eſſence, ſo that national eſtabliſhments would be neceſſary for its ſupport, and yet infallibly productive of its deſtruction. That all theſe evils proceed not from wrong diſpoſitions or accidental cauſes, but ſingly and ſolely from the imperfection of man; and yet that in the gradation from infinite perfection to abſolute nothing, there muſt be one rank occupied by ſuch a creature

ture as man with all his imperfections about him; that these imperfections must be annexed to his situation, and adhere to every thing that relates to him, to his happiness, to his morals, to his government, and to his religion: that, in like manner, all other created beings must have evils and imperfections peculiar to their stations, and proportioned to their inferiority; notwithstanding all which, there is as much good and as little evil in the universal system, as the nature of creation will admit of; and that therefore it is a work equal to what we might expect from the operations of infinite benevolence joined with infinite power.

all this writing assumes a fact which is denied. It assumes that an Almighty God cannot make a world perfect, that is to answer the end for which it is clearly designed without any failure or falling short of his creatures from that perfect end. DIS-

a being may be imperfect with reference to God but perfect, with reference to the end of its creation — The absence of the perfection of God does [illegible]

DISQUISITIONS

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS.

DISQUISITION I.

ON THE CHAIN OF UNIVERSAL BEING.

THE farther we inquire into the works of our great Creator, the more evident marks we ſhall diſcover of his infinite wiſdom and power, and perhaps in none more remarkable, than in that wonderful chain of beings, with which this terreſtrial globe is furniſhed; riſing above each other, from the ſenſeleſs clod, to the brighteſt genius of human kind, in which, though the chain itſelf is ſufficiently viſible, the links, which compoſe it, are ſo minute, and ſo finely wrought, that they are quite imperceptible to our eyes. The various qualities, with which theſe various beings are endued, we perceive without difficulty, but the boundaries of thoſe qualities, which form this chain of ſubordination, are ſo mixed, that where one ends, and the next begins, we are unable

to diſcover. The manner by which this is performed, is a ſubject well worthy of our conſideration, though I do not remember to have ſeen it much conſidered; but on an accurate examination appears to be this.

In order to diffuſe all poſſible happineſs, God has been pleaſed to fill this earth with innumerable orders of beings, ſuperior to each other in proportion to the qualities and faculties which he has thought proper to beſtow upon them; to mere matter he has given extenſion, ſolidity, and gravity; to plants, vegetation; to animals, life and inſtinct; and to man, reaſon; each of which ſuperior qualities augments the excellence and dignity of the poſſeſſor, and places him higher in the ſcale of univerſal exiſtence. In all theſe, it is remarkable, that he has not formed this neceſſary and beautiful ſubordination, by placing beings of quite different natures above each other, but by granting ſome additional quality to each ſuperior order, in conjunction with all thoſe poſſeſſed by their inferiors; ſo that, though

though they riſe above each other in excellence, by means of theſe additional qualities, one mode of exiſtence is common to them all, without which they never could have coaleſced in one uniform and regular ſyſtem.

Thus, for inſtance, in plants we find all the qualities of mere matter, the only order below them, ſolidity, extenſion, and gravity, with the addition of vegetation; in animals, all the properties of matter, together with the vegetation of plants, to which is added, life and inſtinct; and in man we find all the properties of matter, the vegetation of plants, the life and inſtinct of animals, to all which is ſuperadded reaſon.

That man is endued with theſe properties of all inferior orders, will plainly appear by a ſlight examination of his compoſition; his body is material, and has all the properties of mere matter, ſolidity, extenſion, and gravity; it is alſo veſted with the quality of plants, that is, a power of vegetation, which it inceſſantly exerciſes without any knowledge

or conſent of his; it is ſown, grows up, expands, comes to maturity, withers, and dies, like all other vegetables: he poſſeſſes likewiſe the qualities of lower animals, and ſhares their fate; like them, he is called into life without his knowledge or conſent; like them, he is compelled by irreſiſtible inſtincts, to anſwer the purpoſes for which he was deſigned; like them, he performs his deſtined courſe, partakes of its bleſſings, and endures its ſufferings for a ſhort time, then dies, and is ſeen no more: in him inſtinct is not leſs powerful than in them, though leſs viſible, by being confounded with reaſon, which it ſometimes concurs with, and ſometimes counteracts; by this, with the concurrence of reaſon, he is taught the belief of a God, of a future ſtate, and the difference between moral good and evil; to purſue happineſs, to avoid danger, and to take care of himſelf and his offspring; by this too he is frequently impelled, in contradiction to reaſon, to relinquiſh eaſe and ſafety, to traverſe inhoſpitable deſerts and tempeſtuous ſeas, to inflict and ſuffer all the miſeries of war,

and,

and, like the herring and the mackarel, to haſten to his own deſtruction, for the public benefit, which he neither underſtands or cares for. Thus is this wonderful chain extended from the loweſt to the higheſt order of terreſtrial beings, by links ſo nicely fitted, that the beginning and end of each is inviſible to the moſt inquiſitive eye, and yet they altogether compoſe one vaſt and beautiful ſyſtem of ſubordination.

The manner by which the conſummate wiſdom of the divine artificer has formed this gradation, ſo extenſive in the whole, and ſo imperceptible in the parts, is this:— He conſtantly unites the higheſt degree of the qualities of each inferior order to the loweſt degree of the ſame qualities, belonging to the order next above it; by which means, like the colours of a ſkilful painter, they are ſo blended together, and ſhaded off into each other, that no line of diſtinction is any where to be ſeen. Thus, for inſtance, ſolidity, extenſion, and gravity, the qualities

of mere matter, being united with the loweſt degree of vegetation, compoſe a ſtone; from whence this vegetative power aſcending through an infinite variety of herbs, flowers, plants, and trees to its greateſt perfection in the ſenſitive plant, joins there the loweſt degree of animal life in the ſhell-fiſh, which adheres to the rock; and it is difficult to diſtinguiſh which poſſeſſes the greateſt ſhare, as the one ſhews it only by ſhrinking from the finger, and the other by opening to receive the water which ſurrounds it. In the ſame manner this animal life riſes from this low beginning in the ſhell-fiſh, through innumerable ſpecies of inſects, fiſhes, birds, and beaſts to the confines of reaſon, where, in the dog, the monkey, and chimpanzè, it unites ſo cloſely with the loweſt degree of that quality in man, that they cannot eaſily be diſtinguiſhed from each other. From this loweſt degree in the brutal Hottentot, reaſon, with the aſſiſtance of learning and ſcience, advances, through the various ſtages

of

of human underſtanding, which riſe above each other, till in a Bacon or a Newton it attains the ſummit.

Here we muſt ſtop, being unable to purſue the progreſs of this aſtoniſhing chain beyond the limits of this terreſtrial globe with the naked eye; but through the perſpective of analogy and conjecture, we may perceive that it aſcends a great deal higher, to the inhabitants of other planets, to angels, and archangels, the loweſt orders of whom may be united by a like eaſy tranſition with the higheſt of our own, in whom to reaſon may be added intuitive knowledge, inſight into futurity, with innumerable other faculties of which we are unable to form the leaſt idea; through whom it may aſcend, by gradations almoſt infinite, to thoſe moſt exalted of created beings, who are ſeated on the foot-ſtool of the celeſtial throne.

DISQUISITION II.

ON CRUELTY TO INFERIOR ANIMALS.

MAN is that link of the chain of univerſal exiſtence, by which ſpiritual and corporeal beings are united: as the numbers and variety of the latter his inferiors are almoſt infinite, ſo probably are thoſe of the former his ſuperiors; and as we ſee that the lives and happineſs of thoſe below us are dependent on our wills, we may reaſonably conclude, that our lives and happineſs are equally dependent on the wills of thoſe above us; accountable, like ourſelves, for the uſe of this power, to the Supreme Creator and Governor of all things. Should this analogy be well founded, how criminal will our account appear, when laid before that juſt and impartial judge! How will man, that ſanguinary tyrant, be able to excuſe himſelf from the charge of thoſe innumerable

merable cruelties inflicted on his unoffending ſubjects committed to his care, formed for his benefit, and placed under his authority by their common father? whoſe mercy is over all his works, and who expects that this authority ſhould be exerciſed not only with tenderneſs and mercy, but in conformity to the laws of juſtice and gratitude.

But to what horrid deviations from theſe benevolent intentions are we daily witneſſes! No ſmall part of mankind derive their chief amuſements from the deaths and ſufferings of inferior animals; a much greater, conſider them only as engines of wood or iron, uſeful in their ſeveral occupations. The carman drives his horſe, and the carpenter his nail, by repeated blows; and ſo long as theſe produce the deſired effect, and they both go, they neither reflect or care whether either of them have any ſenſe of feeling. The butcher knocks down the ſtately ox with no more compaſſion than the blackſmith hammers a horſe-ſhoe, and plunges his knife into the throat of the innocent lamb,

lamb, with as little reluctance as the taylor ſticks his needle into the collar of a coat.

If there are ſome few, who, formed in a ſofter mould, view with pity the ſufferings of theſe defenceleſs creatures, there is ſcarce one who entertains the leaſt idea, that juſtice or gratitude can be due to their merits or their ſervices. The ſocial and friendly dog is hanged without remorſe, if, by barking in defence of his maſter's perſon and property, he happens unknowingly to diſturb his reſt; the generous horſe, who has carried his ungrateful maſter for many years with eaſe and ſafety, worn out with age and infirmities contracted in his ſervice, is by him condemned to end his miſerable days in a duſt-cart, where the more he exerts his little remains of ſpirit, the more he is whipped, to ſave his ſtupid driver the trouble of whipping ſome other, leſs obedient to the laſh. Sometimes, having been taught the practice of many unnatural and uſeleſs feats in a riding-houſe, he is at laſt turned out and conſigned to the dominion of a hackney-coachman, by whom

whom he is every day corrected for performing thoſe tricks, which he has learned under ſo long and ſevere a diſcipline. The ſluggiſh bear, in contradiction to his nature, is taught to dance, for the diverſion of a malignant mob, by placing red-hot irons under his feet; and the majeſtic bull is tortured by every mode which malice can invent, for no offence but that he is gentle, and unwilling to aſſail his diabolical tormentors. Theſe, with innumerable other acts of cruelty, injuſtice, and ingratitude, are every day committed, not only with impunity, but without cenſure, and even without obſervation; but we may be aſſured, that they cannot finally paſs away unnoticed and unretaliated.

The laws of ſelf-defence undoubtedly juſtify us in deſtroying thoſe animals who would deſtroy us, who injure our properties, or annoy our perſons; but not even theſe, whenever their ſituation incapacitates them from hurting us. I know of no right which we have to ſhoot a bear on an inacceſſible iſland of ice, or an eagle on the mountain's

top,

top, whoſe lives cannot injure us, nor deaths procure us any benefit. We are unable to give life, and therefore ought not wantonly to take it away from the meaneſt inſect, without ſufficient reaſon; they all receive it from the ſame benevolent hand as ourſelves, and have therefore an equal right to enjoy it.

God has been pleaſed to create numberleſs animals intended for our ſuſtenance; and that they are ſo intended, the agreeable flavour of their fleſh to our palates, and the wholeſome nutriment which it adminiſters to our ſtomachs, are ſufficient proofs: theſe, as they are formed for our uſe, propagated by our culture, and fed by our care, we have certainly a right to deprive of life, becauſe it is given and preſerved to them on that condition; but this ſhould always be performed with all the tenderneſs and compaſſion which ſo diſagreeable an office will permit; and no circumſtances ought to be omitted, which can render their executions as quick and eaſy as poſſible. For this,

providence has wiſely and benevolently provided, by forming them in ſuch a manner, that their fleſh becomes rancid and unpalatable by a painful and lingering death; and has thus compelled us to be merciful without compaſſion, and cautious of their ſuffering, for the ſake of ourſelves; but, if there are any whoſe taſtes are ſo vitiated, and whoſe hearts are ſo hardened, as to delight in ſuch inhuman ſacrifices, and to partake of them without remorſe, they ſhould be looked upon as dæmons in human ſhapes, and expect a retaliation of thoſe tortures which they have inflicted on the innocent, for the gratification of their own depraved and unnatural appetites.

So violent are the paſſions of anger and revenge in the human breaſt, that it is not wonderful that men ſhould perſecute their real or imaginary enemies with cruelty and malevolence; but that there ſhould exiſt in nature a being who can receive pleaſure from giving pain, would be totally incredible, if we were not convinced, by melancholy

choly experience, that there are not only many, but that this unaccountable diſpoſition is in ſome manner inherent in the nature of man; for, as he cannot be taught by example, nor led to it by temptation, or prompted to it by intereſt, it muſt be derived from his native conſtitution; and is a remarkable confirmation of what revelation ſo frequently inculcates—that he brings into the world with him an original depravity, the effects of a fallen and degenerate ſtate; in proof of which we need only obſerve, that the nearer he approaches to a ſtate of nature, the more predominant this diſpoſition appears, and the more violently it operates. We ſee children laughing at the miſeries which they inflict on every unfortunate animal which comes within their power: all ſavages are ingenious in contriving, and happy in executing the moſt exquiſite tortures; and the common people of all countries are delighted with nothing ſo much as bull-baitings, prize-fightings, executions, and all ſpectacles of cruelty and horror. Though civilization

civilization may in ſome degree abate this native ferocity, it can never quite extirpate it; the moſt poliſhed are not aſhamed to be pleaſed with ſcenes of little leſs barbarity, and, to the diſgrace of human nature, to dignify them with the name of ſports. They arm cocks with artificial weapons, which nature had kindly denied to their malevolence, and with ſhouts of applauſe and triumph ſee them plunge them into each other's hearts: they view with delight the trembling deer and defenceleſs hare, flying for hours in the utmoſt agonies of terror and deſpair, and at laſt, ſinking under fatigue, devoured by their mercileſs purſuers; they ſee with joy the beautiful pheaſant and harmleſs partridge drop from their flight, weltering in their blood, or perhaps periſhing with wounds and hunger, under the cover of ſome friendly thicket to which they have in vain retreated for ſafety; they triumph over the unſuſpecting fiſh, whom they have decoyed by an inſidious pretence of feeding, and drag him from his native

element by a hook fixed to and tearing out his entrails; and to add to all this, they ſpare neither labour nor expence to preſerve and propagate theſe innocent animals, for no other end but to multiply the objects of their perſecution.

What name ſhould we beſtow on a ſuperior being, whoſe whole endeavours were employed, and whoſe whole pleaſure conſiſted in terrifying, enſnaring, tormenting, and deſtroying mankind? whoſe ſuperior faculties were exerted in fomenting animoſities amongſt them, in contriving engines of deſtruction, and inciting them to uſe them in maiming and murdering each other? whoſe power over them was employed in aſſiſting the rapacious, deceiving the ſimple, and oppreſſing the innocent? who, without provocation or advantage, ſhould continue from day to day, void of all pity and remorſe, thus to torment mankind for diverſion, and at the ſame time endeavour with the utmoſt care to preſerve their lives, and to propagate their ſpecies, in order to in-

creaſe the number of victims devoted to his malevolence, and be delighted in proportion to the miſeries which he occaſioned? I ſay, what name deteſtable enough could we find for ſuch a being? Yet, if we impartially conſider the caſe, and our intermediate ſituation, we muſt acknowledge that, with regard to inferior animals, juſt ſuch a being is a ſportſman.

DISQUISITION III.

ON A PRÆ-EXISTENT STATE.

THAT mankind had exiſted in ſome ſtate previous to the preſent, was the opinion of the wiſeſt ſages of the moſt remote antiquity. It was held by the Gymnoſophiſts of Egypt, the Brachmans of India, the Magi of Perſia, and the greateſt philoſophers of Greece and Rome; it was likewiſe adopted by the fathers of the chriſtian church, and frequently enforced by her primitive writers; why it has been ſo little noticed, ſo much overlooked, rather than rejected, by the divines and metaphyſicians of later ages, I am at a loſs to account for, as it is undoubtedly confirmed by reaſon, by all the appearances of nature, and the doctrines of revelation.

In the firſt place then it is confirmed by reaſon, which teaches us that it is impoſſible that

that the conjunction of a male and female can create, or bring into being an immortal ſoul; they may prepare a material habitation for it; but there muſt be an immaterial præ-exiſtent inhabitant ready to take poſſeſſion. Reaſon aſſures us, that an immortal ſoul, which will exiſt eternally after the diſſolution of the body, muſt have eternally exiſted before the formation of it; for whatever has no end, can never have had any beginning, but muſt exiſt in ſome manner which bears no relation to time, to us totally incomprehenſible; if therefore the ſoul will continue to exiſt in a future life, it muſt have exiſted in a former. Reaſon likewiſe tells us, that an omnipotent and benevolent Creator would never have formed ſuch a world as this, and filled it with ſuch inhabitants, if the preſent was the only, or even the firſt ſtate of their exiſtence, a ſtate which, if unconnected with the paſt and the future, ſeems calculated for no one purpoſe intelligible to our underſtandings; neither of good or evil, of happineſs or miſery, of vir-

tue or vice, of reward or puniſhment, but a confuſed jumble of them altogether, proceeding from no viſible cauſe, and tending to no end. But, as we are certain that infinite power cannot be employed without effect, nor infinite wiſdom without deſign, we may rationally conclude, that this world could be deſigned for nothing more than a priſon, in which we are awhile confined to receive puniſhment for the offences committed in a former, and an opportunity of preparing ourſelves for the enjoyment of happineſs in a future life.

Secondly, Theſe concluſions of reaſon are ſufficiently confirmed by the face of nature and the appearances of things; this world is evidently formed for a place of puniſhment as well as probation; a priſon, or houſe of correction, to which we are committed, ſome for a longer, and ſome for a ſhorter period; ſome to the ſevereſt labour, others to more indulgent taſks; and if we conſider it under this character, we ſhall perceive it admirably fitted for the end for which it was intended.

tended. It is a ſpacious, beautiful, and durable ſtructure; it contains many various apartments, a few very comfortable, many tolerable, and ſome extremely wretched; it is incloſed with a fence ſo impaſſable, that none can ſurmount it but with the loſs of life. Its inhabitants likewiſe exactly reſemble thoſe of other priſons: they come in with malignant diſpoſitions, and unruly paſſions, from whence, like other confined criminals, they receive great part of their puniſhment by abuſing and injuring each other. As we may ſuppoſe, that they have not all been equally guilty, ſo they are not all equally miſerable; the majority are permitted to procure a tolerable ſubſiſtence by their labour, and paſs through their confinement without any extraordinary penalties, except from paying their fees, at their diſcharge by death. Others, who perhaps ſtand in need of more ſevere chaſtiſement, receive it by a variety of methods; ſome by the moſt acute, and ſome by the moſt tedious pains and diſeaſes; ſome by diſappointments, and many

by ſucceſs, in their favourite purſuits; ſome by being condemned to ſituations peculiarly unfortunate, as to thoſe of extreme poverty, or ſuperabundant riches, of deſpicable meanneſs, or painful pre-eminence, of galley-ſlaves in a deſpotic, or miniſters in a free country. If we ſurvey the various regions of the globe, what dreadful ſcenes of wretchedneſs every where preſent themſelves to our eyes! in ſome, we ſee thouſands chained to the oar, and perpetually ſuffering from the inclemency of all weathers, and their more inclement maſters; in ſome, not fewer condemned to wear out their miſerable lives in dreary mines, deprived of air and day-light; and in others, much greater nnmbers torn from their native country, their families, and friends, and ſold to the moſt inhuman of all tyrants, under whoſe laſh they are worn out with fatigue, or expire in torments. The hiſtory of mankind is indeed little more than a detail of their miſeries, ſome inflicted by the hand of providence, and many more by their own wickedneſs, and mutual ill-uſage.

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As nations, we ſee them ſometimes chaſtiſed by plagues, famines, inundations, and earthquakes; and continually deſtroying each other with fire and ſword; we ſee fleets and armies combating with ſavage fury, and employing againſt each other every inſtrument of torture and death, which malevolence can invent, or ferocity make uſe of: we ſee the dying and the dead huddled together in heaps, and weltering in each other's blood; and can we be ſpectators of this horrid tragedy, without conſidering the performers as condemned criminals, compelled, like the gladiators of the ancients, to receive their puniſhment from each other's hands? The orator, the poet, and the hiſtorian may celebrate them, as heroes fighting for the rights and liberties of their reſpective countries; but the chriſtian philoſopher can look upon them in no other light than as condemned ſpirits exiled into human fleſh, and ſent into this world to chaſtiſe each other for paſt offences. As individuals, we ſee men afflicted with innumerable diſeaſes, which proceed

not

not from accident, but are congenial with their original formations, and evidently the diſpoſitions of providence, deſigned for the moſt important ends; the ſtone grows in the human bladder, under the ſame direction as in the quarry, and the ſeeds of ſcurvy, rheumatiſm, and gout are ſown in the blood by the ſame omnipotent hand, which has ſcattered thoſe of vegetables over the face of the earth. From theſe various inſtruments of torture, numberleſs are the miſeries which mankind endure; nor are thoſe perhaps leſs numerous, though leſs viſible, which they ſuffer from that treachery, injuſtice, ingratitude, ill-humour, and perverſeneſs, with which they every hour torment one another, interrupt the peace of ſociety, and imbitter the comforts of domeſtic life; to all which we may add, that wonderful ingenuity which they poſſeſs, of creating imaginary, in the abſence of real misfortunes, and that corroſive quality in the human mind, which, for want of the proper food of buſineſs or contemplation,

preys

preys upon itſelf, and makes ſolitude intolerable, and thinking a moſt painful taſk. Who, that ſurveys this melancholy picture of the preſent life, can entertain a doubt, but that it is intended for a ſtate of puniſhment, and therefore muſt be ſubſequent to ſome former, in which this puniſhment was deſerved.

Laſtly, The opinion of pre-exiſtence is no leſs confirmed by revelation than by reaſon, and the appearances of things; for, although perhaps it is no where in the New Teſtament explicitly enforced, yet throughout the whole tenour of thoſe writings it is every where implied: in them mankind are conſtantly repreſented as coming into the world under a load of guilt; as condemned criminals, the children of wrath, and objects of divine indignation; placed in it for a time by the mercies of God, to give them an opportunity of expiating this guilt by ſufferings, and regaining, by a pious and virtuous conduct, their loſt ſtate of happineſs and innocence: this is ſtiled working out their ſalvation,

ſalvation, not preventing their condemnation, for that is already paſt, and their only hope now is redemption, that is, being reſcued from a ſtate of captivity and ſin, in which they are univerſally involved. This is the very eſſence of the chriſtian diſpenſation, and the grand principle in which it differs from the religion of nature; in every other reſpect they are nearly ſimilar; they both enjoin the ſame moral duties, and prohibit the ſame vices; both inculcate the belief of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments; but here they eſſentially diſagree; natural religion informs us, that a juſt and benevolent Creator could have no other deſign in placing us in this world, but to make us happy, and that, if we commit no extraordinary crimes, we may hope to be ſo in another; but chriſtianity teaches a ſeverer and more alarming leſſon, and acquaints us, that we are admitted into this life oppreſſed with guilt and depravity, which we muſt atone for by ſuffering its uſual calamities, and work off by acts of poſitive virtue, before

we can hope for happineſs in another. Now, if by all this a præ-exiſtent ſtate is not conſtantly ſuppoſed, that is, that mankind have exiſted in ſome ſtate previous to the preſent, in which this guilt was incurred, and this depravity contracted, there can be no meaning at all, or ſuch a meaning as contradicts every principle of common ſenſe—that guilt can be contracted without acting, or that we can act without exiſting: ſo undeniable is this inference, that it renders any poſitive aſſertion of a præ-exiſtent ſtate totally uſeleſs; as, if a man at the moment of his entrance into a new country was declared a criminal, it would ſurely be unneceſſary to aſſert, that he had lived in ſome other before he came there.

In all our reſearches into abſtruſe ſubjects, there is a certain clue, without which, the further we proceed the more we are bewildered, but which being fortunately diſcovered, leads us at once through the whole labyrinth, puts an end to our difficulties, and opens a ſyſtem perfectly clear, conſiſtent,

ent, and intelligible. The doctrine of præexiſtence, or the acknowledgment of ſome paſt ſtate of guilt and diſobedience, I take to be this very clue; which, if we conſtantly carry along with us, we ſhall proceed unembarraſſed through all the intricate myſteries both of nature and revelation, and at laſt arrive at ſo clear a proſpect of the wiſe and juſt diſpenſations of our Creator, as cannot fail to afford compleat ſatisfaction to the moſt inquiſitive ſceptic.

For inſtance; Are we unable to anſwer that important queſtion, Whence came evil? that is, why a Creator of infinite power, wiſdom, and goodneſs, ſhould have formed a world replete with ſo many imperfections, and thoſe ſo productive of calamities to its inhabitants? this clue will direct us to this ſatisfactory reply, as far as the queſtion relates to the evils of the preſent life—Becauſe he deſigned it for a place of puniſhment and probation, for which it is perfectly adapted; and we can be no more ſurpriſed to ſee ſuch a world as this make a part of the univerſal

ſyſtem,

ſyſtem, than to ſee a magnificent priſon with all its appendages of puniſhment, whips, pillories, and gibbets, make a part of a large, populous, and well-governed city. Are we under difficulties to comprehend why the ſame omnipotent and benevolent Creator ſhould fill this world with inhabitants ſo wicked, and ſo miſerable? this clue will immediately lead us to a ſolution of them, and point out the true reaſon—becauſe they are ſent hither to be puniſhed and reformed. Do we reject all thoſe paſſages in the New Teſtament as derogatory to the divine wiſdom and goodneſs, which declare, that mankind come into this world under a load of guilt and depravity, and under the diſpleaſure of their Creator?—no ſooner are we brought by this clue within ſight of a præexiſtent ſtate, in which this guilt and depravity may have been contracted, but our incredulity vaniſhes, and we perceive plainly, that their admiſſion into this world, under thoſe circumſtances, is not only conſiſtent with the juſtice of God, but the ſtrongeſt inſtance

inſtance of his mercy and benevolence; as by it they are enabled to purge off this depravity, to expiate their offences, and to reinſtate themſelves in his favour.

Thus is a præ-exiſtent ſtate, I think, clearly demonſtrated, by the principles of reaſon, the appearances of things, and the ſenſe of revelation; all which agree, that this world is intended for a place of puniſhment, as well as probation, and muſt therefore refer to ſome former period; for, as probation implies a future life, for which it is preparatory, ſo puniſhment muſt imply a former ſtate, in which offences were committed, for which it is due; and indeed there is not a ſingle argument drawn from the juſtice of God, and the ſeemingly undeſerved ſufferings of many in the preſent ſtate, which can be urged in proof of a future life, which proves not with ſuperior force the exiſtence of another, which is already paſt.

DISQUISITION IV.

ON THE NATURE OF TIME.

WE are ſo accuſtomed to connect our ideas of time with the hiſtory of what paſſes in it, that is, to miſtake a ſucceſſion of thoughts and actions for time, that we find it extremely difficult, perhaps impoſſible, totally to ſeparate or diſtinguiſh them from each other: and indeed, had we power to effect this in our minds, all human language is ſo formed, that it would fail us in our expreſſion: yet certain it is, that time abſtracted from the thoughts, actions, and motions which paſs in it, is actually nothing: it is only the mode in which ſome created beings are ordained to exiſt, but in itſelf has really no exiſtence at all.

Though this opinion may ſeem chimerical to many, who have not much conſidered the ſubject, yet it is by no means new, for it was

long ſince adopted by ſome of the moſt celebrated philoſophers of antiquity, particularly by the Epicureans; and is thus well expreſſed by Lucretius:

Tempus item per ſe non eſt; ſed rebus ab ipſis
Conſequitur ſenſus, tranſactum quod ſit in ævo,
Tum quæ res inſtat, quid porro deinde ſequatur;
Nec per ſe, quemquam tempus ſentire, fatendum eſt,
Semotum ab uſum, motu, placidaque quiete.

Time of itſelf is nothing; but from thought
Receives its riſe, by lab'ring fancy wrought,
From things conſidered: while we think on ſome
As preſent, ſome as paſt, and ſome to come:
No thought can think on Time, that's ſtill confeſs'd,
But thinks on things in motion, or at reſt.

CREECH.

From obſerving the diurnal revolutions of the ſun, and the various tranſactions which paſs during thoſe revolutions, we acquire conceptions of days; by dividing theſe days we form hours, minutes, and ſeconds; and by multiplying them, months, years, and ages; then by meaſuring theſe imaginary periods againſt each other, and beſtowing on

on each diſtinct denominations, we give them the appearance of ſomething real: yeſterday, which is paſt, and to-morrow, which is not yet come, aſſume the ſame reality as the preſent day; and thus we imagine time to reſemble a great book, one of whoſe pages is every day wrote on, and the reſt remain blank, to be filled up in their turns with the events of futurity; whilſt in fact this is all but the deluſion of our own imaginations, and time is nothing more than the manner in which paſt, preſent, and future events ſucceed each other; yet is this deluſion ſo correſpondent with our preſent ſtate, and ſo woven up with all human language, that without much reflection it cannot be perceived, nor when perceived can it be remedied; nor can I, while endeavouring to prove time to be nothing, avoid treating it as ſomething in almoſt every line.

There ſeems to be in the nature of things two modes of exiſtence; one, in which all events, paſt, preſent, and to come, appear in one view; which, if the expreſſion may be

allowed, I ſhall call perpetually inſtantaneous; and which, as I apprehend, conſtitutes Eternity: the other, in which all things are preſented ſeparately and ſucceſſively, which produces what we call Time.

Of the firſt of theſe human reaſon can afford us no manner of conception; yet it aſſures us, on the ſtrongeſt evidence, that ſuch muſt be the exiſtence of the Supreme Creator of all things, that ſuch probably may be the exiſtence of many ſuperior orders of created beings, and that ſuch poſſibly may be our own in another ſtate: to beings ſo conſtituted, all events paſt, preſent, and future are preſented in one congregated maſs, which to us are ſpread out in ſucceſſion to adapt them to our temporary mode of perception: in theſe ideas have no ſucceſſion, and therefore to their thoughts, actions, or exiſtence, time, which is ſucceſſion only, can bear not the leaſt relation whatſoever. To exiſtence of this kind alone can eternity belong; for eternity can never be compoſed of finite parts, which, however multiplied, can never

never become infinite; but muſt be ſomething ſimple, uniform, invariable, and indiviſible; permanent, though inſtantaneous, and endleſs without progreſſion. There are ſome remarkable expreſſions both in the Old and New Teſtament, alluding to this mode of exiſtence; in the former, God is denominated *I am* *; and in the latter, Chriſt ſays, *Before Abraham was, I am* †: both evidently implying duration without ſucceſſion: from whence the ſchoolmen probably derive their obſcure notions of ſuch a kind of duration, which they explain by the more obſcure term of a *punctum ſtans*.

With the other mode of exiſtence we are ſufficiently acquainted, being that in which Providence has placed us, and all things around us, during our reſidence on this terreſtrial globe; in which all ideas follow each other in our minds in a regular and uniform ſucceſſion, not unlike the tickings of a clock; and by that means all objects are

* Exod. iv. 14. † John viii. 58.

preſented to our imaginations in the ſame progreſſive manner: and if any vary much from that deſtined pace, by too rapid, or too ſlow a motion, they immediately become to us totally imperceptible. We now perceive every one, as it paſſes, through a ſmall aperture ſeparately, as in the camera obſcura, and this we call time; but at the concluſion of this ſtate we may probably exiſt in a manner quite different; the window may be thrown open, the whole proſpect appear at one view, and all this apparatus, which we call time, be totally done away: for time is certainly nothing more, than the ſhifting of ſcenes neceſſary for the performance of this tragi-comical farce, which we are here exhibiting, and muſt undoubtedly end with the concluſion of the drama. It has no more a real eſſence, independent of thought and action, than ſight, hearing, and ſmell have, independent of their proper organs, and the animals to whom they belong; and when they ceaſe to exiſt, time can be no more. There are alſo ſeveral paſſages

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in the ſcriptures, declaring this annihilation of time, at the conſummation of all things: *And the Angel, which I ſaw ſtand upon the ſea and the earth, lifted up his hand towards heaven, and ſwore by him that liveth for ever and ever, &c. that there ſhould be time no longer**.

To this opinion of the non-entity of time it has by ſome been objected, that time has many attributes and powers inherent in its nature; and that whatever has attributes and powers, muſt itſelf exiſt: it is infinite, ſay they, and eternal; it contains all things; and forces itſelf on our imaginations in the abſence of all other exiſtence. But to this it may be anſwered, that the human mind is able in the very ſame manner to realize nothing; and then all the ſame attributes and powers are applicable with equal propriety to that nothing, thus ſuppoſed to be ſomething:

† Nothing, thou elder brother ev'n to ſhade!
Thou had'ſt a being, ere the world was made,
And well fix'd are alone of ending not afraid.

* Rev. x. 5. † Lord Rocheſter.

Nothing is infinite, and eternal; that is, hath neither beginning nor end: it contains all things; that is, it begins where all exiſtence ends, and therefore ſurrounds and contains all things: it forces itſelf on the mind, in the abſence of all exiſtence; that is, where we ſuppoſe there is no exiſtence, we muſt ſuppoſe there is nothing: this exact reſemblance of their attributes and powers, more plainly demonſtrates, that time is nothing.

From this non-exiſtence of time thus eſtabliſhed, many concluſions will ariſe, both uſeful and entertaining; from whence perhaps new lights may be thrown on ſeveral ſpeculations religious and metaphyſical, whoſe outlines I ſhall juſt venture to trace, and leave them to be filled up by abler pens.

1ſt. If time be no more than the ſucceſſion of ideas and actions, however theſe may be accelerated or retarded, time will be juſt the ſame: that is, neither longer or ſhorter, provided the ſame ideas and actions ſucceed one another, as far, I mean, as it relates to beings

beings ſo thinking and acting. For inſtance, were the earth and all the celeſtial bodies to perform the ſame revolutions in one day, which they now perform in a whole year, and were all the ideas, actions, and lives of mankind haſtened on in the ſame proportion, the period of our lives would not be in the leaſt ſhortened; but that day would be exactly equal to the preſent year: if in the ſpace of ſeventy or eighty of theſe days a man was born, educated, and grown up, had exerciſed a profeſſion, had ſeen his children come to maturity, his grandchildren ſucceed them, and, during this period, had had all his ideas and actions, all his enjoyments and ſufferings, accelerated in the ſame proportion, he would not only ſeem to himſelf, and to all who lived in the ſame ſtate with him, and meaſured time by the ſame ſtandard, to have lived as long, but actually and in fact would have lived as long as one who reſides on this globe as great a number of our preſent years.

2dly. This being the caſe, it follows, that the

the life of every man muſt be longer or ſhorter, in proportion to the number of his thoughts and actions; for was it poſſible for a man to think and act as much in an hour as in a year, that hour, as far as it related to him, would not only ſeem, but actually become a year. On the other hand, was it poſſible for a man totally to abſtain from thinking and acting for an hour, or a year, time, with regard to him, for that period, would have no exiſtence; or, could he keep one idea fixed in his mind, and continue one ſingle act during the ſame ſpace, time, which is a ſucceſſion only of ideas and actions, muſt be equally annihilated: whether theſe ideas and actions are exerciſed on great or little occaſions, whether they are productive of pleaſing or painful ſenſations, with regard to this purpoſe their effects will be the ſame; neither their importance or conſequences will add any thing to time, but their numbers and celerity moſt undoubtedly will. Our lives, therefore, when diverſified with a variety of objects, and buſied in a multipli-

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city of purſuits, though perhaps leſs happy, will certainly be longer, than when doſed away in ſloth, inactivity, and apathy.

3dly. From hence it is evident, that we can form no judgment of the duration of the lives, enjoyments, and ſufferings of other animals, with the progreſſion of whoſe ideas we are totally unacquainted, and who may be framed in that reſpect, as well as in many others, ſo widely different from ourſelves. The gaudy butterfly, that flutters in the ſunſhine but for a few months, may live as long as the ſtupid tortoiſe that breathes for a century; the inſect, that ſurvives not one diurnal revolution of the ſun, may, for any thing we know, enjoy an age of happineſs; and the miſerable horſe, that appears to us to ſuffer the drudgery of ten or twenty years, may finiſh his laborious taſk in as many months, days, or hours.

4thly. For the like reaſons we can judge but very imperfectly of what are real evils in the univerſal ſyſtem, whilſt we remain in this temporal ſtate of exiſtence, in which all things are exhibited to us by ſcraps, one

after the other; for theſe detached portions, which viewed ſeparately, ſeem but miſ-ſhapen blotches, may to beings, who in an eternal ſtate ſee paſt, preſent, and future, all delineated on one canvaſs, appear as well-diſpoſed ſhades neceſſary to render perfect the whole moſt beautiful landſkip. Nay, even pain, that taken ſingly is ſo pungent and diſagreeable a potion, when thrown into the cup of univerſal happineſs, may, perhaps, add to it a flavour, which without this infuſion it could not have acquired.

5thly. If time has itſelf no exiſtence, it can never put an end to the exiſtence of any thing elſe; and this ſeems no inconcluſive argument for the immortality of the ſoul; for if any thing is, and no cauſe appears to us why it ſhould ceaſe to be, we can have no good reaſon to believe that it will not continue. Whatever has no connection with time muſt be eternal: now the only property of the ſoul, with which we are acquainted, is thought, which bears no relation to time; whence it is reaſonable to

ſuppoſe,

ſuppoſe, that the ſoul itſelf is equally unconnected with it, and conſequently eternal. Even in material beings we ſee continual mutations, but can perceive no ſymptoms of annihilation; and therefore we have ſurely leſs cauſe to ſuſpect it in immaterial: from whence I am inclined to think, that the eſſences of all things are eternal, that is, unrelative to time, and that it is only our manner of perceiving them, that cauſes them to appear temporal to us; paſt, preſent, and future being not inherent in their natures, but only in our progreſſive mode of perception.

6thly. From what has been ſaid, we may perceive into what amazing abſurdities many of our ableſt divines and metaphyſicians have plunged, in their inveſtigations of eternity; for making which their receipt is uſually this: they take of time a ſufficient quantity, and, chopping it in ſmall pieces, they diſpoſe them in imaginary lengths, which they diſtinguiſh by the names of minutes, hours, days, years, and ages; then feeling

feeling in their own minds a power of multiplying theſe as often as they think fit, they heap millions upon millions; and finding this power to be a machine that may be worked backwards and forwards with equal facility, they extend their line both ways, and ſo their eternity is compleated, and fit for uſe: they then divide it in the middle, and out of a ſingle eternity they make two, as they term them, *a parte ante*, and *a parte poſt*; each of which having one end, may be drawn out, like a juggler's ribband, as long as they pleaſe. The contradictions ſo manifeſt in this ſyſtem, ſufficiently declare its falſhood; for in adopting it we muſt acknowledge, that each half of this eternity is equal to the whole; that in each the number of days cannot exceed that of the months, nor the months be more numerous than the years, they being all alike infinite; that whether it commenced yeſterday, or ten thouſand years ſince, the length of its duration muſt be the ſame; for the length depends not on the beginning, but on the end, but that

that cannot be different, where there is no end at all: the abſurdity of all theſe propoſitions is too glaring to ſtand in need of any refutation; for it is evident, that whatever contains parts, length, or numbers, can never be infinite; whatever had a beginning muſt have an end, becauſe beginning and ending are the modes of temporary exiſtence: what has no end could have no beginning, becauſe both are equally inconſiſtent with eternity. In truth, all theſe abſurdities ariſe from applying to eternity our ideas of time, which, being two modes of exiſtence intirely different, bear not the leaſt relation to each other: time is in its nature finite and ſucceſſive; eternity infinite and inſtantaneous; and therefore their properties are no more applicable to each other, than thoſe of ſounds to colours, or of colours to ſounds; and we can no more form eternity out of time, than, by mixing red, blue, and green, we can compoſe an anthem or an opera.

7thly.

7thly. From hence appears the neceſſity, in our conſiderations on theſe ſubjects, of keeping our ideas of theſe two modes of exiſtence intirely and conſtantly diſtinct, as they themſelves are in nature; by which means we ſhall preſently ſweep away many of thoſe theological and metaphyſical cobwebs, which now encumber and diſgrace our moſt learned libraries; and cut ſhort many impertinent enquiries concerning the creation of the univerſe, God's foreknowledge and predeſtination, the præ-exiſtent and future ſtate of ſouls, the injuſtice of eternal puniſhments, and the ſleep of the ſoul, with numberleſs others of the ſame kind, all derived from injudiciouſly blending and confounding theſe two kinds of exiſtence together, and applying notions and expreſſions to one, which can only with propriety belong to the other.

To enter largely into theſe abſtruſe and intricate ſubjects, would require a folio; I ſhall therefore only ſay one word or two to each.

It

It has been frequently aſked, why God created the univerſe at the time in which he did create it, and why he ſuffered millions of ages to paſs away before the commencement of ſo glorious a work? to this it may be replied with equal conciſeneſs and truth, that in fact no ſuch ages ever did or could paſs before it was created; nor was it created in any time at all; for neither the eſſence or actions of God have the moſt diſtant relation to time; he has been pleaſed in his infinite wiſdom to beſtow on ſome parts of his creation a temporal mode of exiſtence, and from this alone time derives its origin: to ſuppoſe time antecedent to temporal exiſtence, is to ſuppoſe effects to precede their cauſes; and not leſs abſurd than to imagine, that there could be perception before ſenſitive beings, or thought before intelligent beings exiſted. This very queſtion proves the abſurdity of connecting time and eternity together; for if God's power of creating is coæval with his exiſtence, that exiſtence eternal, and that eternity only time extended; this evident

contradiction follows, that God, though always equally able, yet in fact never could create any thing ſo ſoon, but that he might have created it ſooner: that is in others words, that he never could create any thing as ſoon as he could. All this puzzle ariſes from our foolifhly ſuppoſing, that eternal and temporal beings muſt act in a manner ſimilar to each other: if we do any thing, it muſt be done at ſome time or other; but God acts in ways as different from ours, as inconceivable to us; his ways are not like our ways, nor his thoughts like our thoughts: one day is to him as a thouſand years, and a thouſand years as one day; that is, neither of them, with his manner of exiſting, thinking, or acting, have any connection whatever.

All diſputes about God's foreknowledge and predeſtination, are of the ſame ſpecies, and derive their birth entirely from the ſame abſurd ſuppoſition. Foreknowledge and predeſtination imply ſucceſſion, and are relative to time, which has no relation to the eſſence or perception of the Creator of all things; and therefore, in the ſenſe uſually applied to them,

them, cannot with any propriety be attributed to him. He knows all things, and ordains all things; but as all things are equally preſent to the divine intuition, it is impoſſible that he can foreknow or predeſtinate any thing.

Of the ſame kind are all queſtions concerning the præ-exiſtent and future ſtate of the ſoul, ariſing likewiſe from confounding our ideas of theſe two modes of exiſtence, temporal and eternal: whenever the ſoul is united with a body, perceiving all things by ſucceſſion through material organs, it acquires ideas of time, and can form none of exiſtence unconnected with it; but whenever this union is diſſolved, it probably returns again to its native mode of eternal exiſtence, in which the whole circle of its perception being at once viſible; it has nothing further to do with time; it is neither old or young, it lives no more in the ſeventeenth than in the ſeventh century, no nearer to the end than the beginning of the world: all ideas of years and ages, of præ-exiſtence

and futurity, of beginning and ending, will be totally obliterated; and poſſibly it will be as incapable of forming any conceptions of time, as it is now of eternity. The ſoul, therefore, being quite unconnected with time, whenever it is unconnected with a body, cannot properly be ſaid to exiſt in another time, either prior or poſterior, but only in another manner.

Every argument alſo endeavouring to prove the injuſtice and diſproportion of eternal puniſhments for temporal offences, is founded on the ſame erroneous principles, and admits of the ſame anſwer; that all computations of the magnitude of ſuch puniſhments from their duration, by heaping years and ages upon each other, are abſurd and inconſiſtent with that ſtate in which they are to be inflicted: crimes will there be puniſhed according to the degrees of their malignity, but neither for a long, or a ſhort, nor for any time at all: for all puniſhments muſt be correſpondent to the ſtate in which they are ſuffered: in an eternal ſtate, they muſt be eternal, in a temporal

poral they muſt be temporal; for it is equally impoſſible, that a being can be puniſhed for a time, where no time is, as that it ſhould be puniſhed everlaſtingly in a ſtate which itſelf cannot laſt. As therefore, from the nature of things, this diſpenſation is neceſſary, it cannot be unjuſt, and from the infinite wiſdom and goodneſs of the Author of nature, we may reaſonably preſume that it cannot be diſproportioned to its ſeveral objects.

The non-entity of time will ſerve likewiſe to ſettle a late ingenious controverſy, and ſhew, that, like moſt others of the kind, it is a diſpute only upon words: this controverſy is concerning the ſleep of the ſoul; that is, whether it enters into a ſtate of happineſs or miſery immediately on its diſſolution from the body, or remains in a ſtate of profound inſenſibility till the general judgment, and then receives its final ſentence, and ſuffers its execution: for if time is nothing but the thoughts and actions which paſs in it, the condition of the ſoul, whether

it ſleeps or not, will be exactly the ſame: nor will the final ſentence be one moment deferred by ſuch a ſtate of inſenſibility, how long ſoever it may continue; for though, during that period, many revolutions of the ſun, and of empires, may take place, many millions of thoughts and actions may paſs, which not only meaſure time, but create it; yet with regard to the ſoul ſo ſleeping, none of theſe, that is, no time will paſs at all; and, if no time intervenes, judgment, however remote with regard to others, will as inſtantly follow its diſſolution, as if that had happened the precedent moment. But if, according to the foregoing principles, the ſoul in a ſeparate ſtate bears no relation to time, then no event in which it is there concerned can be before or after another, either nearer or farther from any period, from death or judgment, from the creation or diſſolution of this planetary ſyſtem: this we ſee muſt at once put an end to all diſputes on this ſubject, and render the uſe of ſoporifics entirely needleſs.

After

After all that has been here advanced, I am not inſenſible that we are here ſo conſtantly converſant with temporal objects, and ſo totally unacquainted with eternal, that few, very few, will ever be able to abſtract exiſtence from time, or comprehend that any thing can exiſt out of, and unconnected with it: in vain ſhould I ſuggeſt, that the various planets are peopled by the divine wiſdom with a variety of beings, and even this terreſtrial globe with innumerable creatures, whoſe ſituations are ſo different, that their manner of exiſtence is quite unknown and incomprehenſible to each other; that millions inhabit the impenetrable receſſes of the unfathomable ocean, who can no more form conceptions of any exiſtence beyond the limits of that their native element, than we ourſelves can beyond the boundaries of time; and that therefore in reality, time may be no more neceſſary to exiſtence than water, though the mode of that exiſtence we are unable to comprehend. But, I well know, theſe analogous arguments have little

weight; the prejudice of education, the ſtrength of habit, and the force of language, all formed on the ſuppoſed union of exiſtence with time, will perſuade men to reject this hypotheſis as vain and chimerical. To all buſy men, and men of buſineſs, to all jogging on in the beaten roads of profeſſions, or ſcrambling up the precipices of ambition, theſe conſiderations muſt appear unprofitable illuſions, if not incomprehenſible nonſenſe; for to endeavour to convince a merchant ſubſiſting on long credit, a lawyer enriched by delay, a divine who has purchaſed a next preſentation, a general who is in no hurry to fight, or a miniſter whoſe object is the continuance of his power, that time is nothing, is an arduous taſk, and very unlikely to be attended with ſucceſs. Whoever deſires to taſte or underſtand ſuch abſtracted ſpeculations, muſt leave for a while the noiſy buſtle of worldly occupations, and retire into the ſequeſtered ſhades of ſolitude and contemplation: from whence he will return certainly not richer, poſſibly not wiſer, but probably

bably more ſuſceptible of amuſement from his own company for want of better, and more able to draw entertainment from his own imaginations; which in his journey through life he will often find an acquiſition not altogether inconſiderable.

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DISQUISITION V.

ON THE ANALOGY BETWEEN THINGS MATERIAL AND INTELLECTUAL.

AS all things, both material and intellectual, are derived from the ſame omnipotent author, we ſhall find, on an accurate examination, that there is a certain analogy, which runs through them all, well worthy of our attention and admiration; that is, that there are in the elements of the material world, and in the paſſions and actions of mankind, powers and propenſities of a ſimilar nature, which operate in a ſimilar manner, throughout every part of the material, moral, and political ſyſtem. But this theory, rather abſtruſe, is difficult to be explained, and will be beſt elucidated by examples, which every day fall within our obſervation.

In the material world, for inſtance, we ſee all

all diſorders cured by their own exceſſes: a ſultry calm fails not to produce a ſtorm, which diſſipates the noxious vapours, and reſtores a purer air; the fierceſt tempeſt, exhauſted by its own violence, at length ſubſides; and an intenſe ſun-ſhine, whilſt it parches up the thirſty earth, exhales clouds, which quickly water it with refreſhing ſhowers. Juſt ſo in the moral world, all our paſſions and vices, by their exceſſes, defeat themſelves: exceſſive rage renders men impotent to execute the miſchiefs which they threaten; repeated treacheries make them unable to deceive, becauſe none will truſt them; and extreme profligacy, by the diſeaſes which it occaſions, deſtroys their appetites, and works an unwilling reformation.

As in the natural world, the elements are reſtrained in their moſt deſtructive effects, by their mutual oppoſition; ſo in the moral, are the vices of mankind prevented from being totally ſubverſive of ſociety, by their continually counteracting each other: profuſion reſtores to the public the wealth which

which avarice has detained from it for a time; envy clips the towering wings of ambition; and even revenge, by its terrors, prevents many injuries and oppreſſions: the treachery of the thief diſcovers his accomplices; the perfidy of the proſtitute brings the highwayman to juſtice; and the villainy of the aſſaſſin puts an end to the cruelty of a tyrant.

In the material world, the middle climates, fartheſt removed from the extremes of heat and cold, are the moſt ſalubrious and moſt pleaſant: ſo in life, the middle ranks are ever moſt favourable to virtue, and to happineſs; which dwell not in the extremes of poverty or riches.

As throughout the various regions of the earth, advantages and inconveniences are diſtributed with a more impartial hand than we on a tranſitory view are apt to imagine; ſo are they to the various conditions of human life: if the more ſouthern climates are gilded with a brighter ſun-ſhine, perfumed with more fragrant gales, and decorated with a greater

a greater profuſion of plants and flowers, they are at the ſame time perpetually expoſed to peſtilential heats, infeſted with noxious animals, torn by hurricanes, and rocked by earthquakes, unknown to the rougher regions of the north. In like manner, if the rich enjoy luxuries, from which the poor are debarred, they ſuffer many diſeaſes and diſquietudes, from which thoſe are fortunately exempted.

We behold with admiration the vivid azure of the vaulted ſky, and variegated colours of the diſtant clouds; but, if we approach them on the ſummit of ſome lofty mountain, we diſcover that the beauteous ſcene is all illuſion, and find ourſelves involved only in a dreary fog or a tempeſtuous whirlwind: juſt ſo, in youth, we look up with pleaſing expectation to the pleaſures and honours, which we fondly imagine will attend maturer age; at which, if we arrive, the brilliant proſpect vaniſhes in diſappointment, and we meet with nothing more than a dull inactivity or turbulent contentions.

The

The properties of the various ſeaſons of the year, the gaiety of ſpring, the vigour of ſummer, the ſerenity of autumn, and the gloom of winter, have been ſo often aſſimilated to the correſponding periods of human life; the dangers and diſquietudes of grandeur ſo often compared to the tempeſtuous ſituation of lofty mountains; and the quiet ſafety of inferior ſtations, to the calm ſecurity of the humbler vale, that a repetition of them here would be impertinent, and uſeleſs; yet they all contribute to point out that analogy which uniformly pervades every part of the creation with which we are acquainted.

Between the material and political world, this analogy is ſtill more conſpicuous: in the former, every particle of matter, of which the vaſt machine is compoſed, is actuated by that wonderful principle of attraction, which reſtrains, impels, and directs its progreſs to the deſtined end; in the latter, every individual of which the great political body is formed, is actuated by ſelf-intereſt, a principle ex-

actly ſimilar, which, by a conſtant endeavour to draw all things to itſelf, reſtrains, impels, and directs his paſſions, deſigns, and actions to the important ends of government and ſociety. As the firſt operates with force in proportion to the contents of the body in which it reſides, ſo does the latter; in individuals it is ſmall, in ſocieties greater, and in populous and extenſive empires moſt powerful. As the one acts with power in proportion to its diſtance, ſo does the other; for we conſtantly find, that a ſmall benefit beſtowed on men as individuals, will influence them much more than a larger, which they may receive from national proſperity; and a trifling loſs, which immediately affects themſelves, is more regretted, than one more conſiderable, which they feel only through the medium of public calamities. In another reſpect, alſo, they greatly reſemble each other; they are both productive of many miſchiefs, yet both neceſſary to the well-being and preſervation of the whole. It is attraction that plunges us in the ocean; daſhes

daſhes us againſt the rocks; tumbles us from the precipice; and pulls down the tottering fabric on our heads: but it is this, alſo, that conſtitutes all body, that binds together the terreſtrial globe, guides the revolving planets in their courſes, and without it not only the whole material ſyſtem would be diſſolved, but I am inclined to think, that matter itſelf muſt be annihilated; for, matter being infinitely diviſible, without this property it muſt be infinitely divided; and infinite diviſion ſeems to be nothing leſs than annihilation: for without attraction there could be no coheſion, without coheſion no ſolidity, and without ſolidity no matter. In like manner, ſelf-intereſt, or what we miſtake for it, is the ſource of all our crimes, and moſt of our ſufferings. It is this that ſeduces the profligate, by the proſpect of pleaſure; tempts the villain by the hopes of gain; and bribes the hero with the voice of fame: but it is this alſo that is the ſource of all our connections, civil, religious, political, and commercial; that binds us together in families, in cities, and in nations, and directs

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our united labours to the public benefit: and without its influence, arts and learning, trade and manufactures, would be at an end, and all government, like matter by infinite diviſion, would be annihilated.

The natural world ſubſiſts by a perpetual contention of the elements of which it is compoſed, the political by as conſtant a conteſt of its internal parties, ſtruggling for ſuperiority. In the former, the great ſyſtem is carried on by a continual rotation of good and evil, alternately producing, and ſucceeding each other: continued ſunſhine produces tempeſts; theſe diſcharge themſelves in refreſhing rains; rains cauſe inundations, which, after ſome ravages, ſubſiding, aſſiſt commerce and agriculture, by ſcouring out the beds of rivers, and fertilizing lands; and ſunſhine returns again: ſo in the latter, long peace, the political ſunſhine, generates corruption, luxury, and faction, the parents of deſtructive wars; war for a time awakens national vigour, and pours down wealth and plunder, then cauſes inundations of poverty and diſ-

treſs; diſtreſs calls forth induſtry, agriculture, and commerce, and peace returns once more.

As night and day, winter and ſummer, are alternately circulated over the various regions of the globe; ſo are poverty and wealth, idleneſs and induſtry, ignorance and ſcience, deſpotiſm and liberty, by an uniform proceſs ariſing from their own natural conſtitutions, and their invariable effects upon each other. In poor countries, neceſſity incites induſtry, and cheapneſs of proviſions invites traders and manufacturers to reſide; this ſoon introduces wealth, learning, and liberty; and theſe are as ſoon followed by profuſion, faction, and licentiouſneſs; commerce will keep no ſuch company, but, like a bird of paſſage, migrates to climes by poverty and cheapneſs better adapted to her conſtitution: theſe, in their turns, grow rich, civilized, free, diſſolute, and licentious in the ſame manner, and are ſucceſſively deſerted for the ſame reaſon, and the ſame circle is again renewed.

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In the material world, the conſtant circulation of the air, and flux and reflux of the tides, preſerve thoſe elements from a putrid ſtagnation; ſo in the political, controverſies, civil and religious, keep up the ſpirits of national communities, and prevent them from ſinking into a ſtate of indolence and ignorance: but if either exceed the bounds of moderation, their conſequences are extremely fatal; the former producing ſtorms and inundations, and the latter anarchy and confuſion. Lord Bacon obſerves, that war is to ſtates, what exerciſe is to individuals; and in this they are extremely ſimilar; a proper proportion may contribute to health and vigour, but too much emaciates and wears out a conſtitution.

Thus, by a wiſe and wonderful diſpoſition of things material and intellectual, God has infuſed into them all powers and propenſities greatly analogous, by which they are enabled and compelled, in a ſimilar manner, to perform their reſpective parts in the general ſyſtem, to reſtrain their own exceſſes,

and to call back each other, whenever they too far deviate from their deſtined ends; and has ſaid unto every thing, as well as to the ocean, to night and day, to winter and ſummer, to heat and cold, to rain and ſunſhine, to happineſs and miſery, to ſcience and ignorance, to war and peace, to liberty and deſpotiſm, "Hitherto ſhalt thou go, and no farther." Theſe amazing inſtances of infinite wiſdom in the œconomy of things, preſenting every where an analogy ſo remarkable, are well worthy of our higheſt admiration; yet have been but little obſerved, becauſe theſe divine diſpoſitions appear to us to be no more than the neceſſary conſequences of previous cauſes, and the invariable operations of nature, and we forget that nature is nothing more than the art of her omnipotent author.

DIS-

DISQUISITION VI.

ON RATIONAL CHRISTIANITY.

TO ſeveral learned and ingenious writers, ſome doctrines of the Chriſtian religion have appeared ſo contradictory to all the principles of reaſon and equity, that they cannot aſſent to them, nor believe that they can be derived from the fountain of all truth and juſtice. In order, therefore, to ſatisfy themſelves and others, who may labour under the ſame difficulties, they have undertaken the arduous taſk of reconciling revelation and reaſon; and great would have been their merits, had they begun at the right end, that is, had they endeavoured to exalt the human underſtanding to the comprehenſion of the ſublime doctrines of the goſpel, rather than to reduce thoſe doctrines to the low ſtandard of human reaſon; but, unfortunately for themſelves and many

others, they have made choice of the latter method, and, as the ſhorteſt way to effect it, have with inconſiderate raſhneſs expunged from the New Teſtament every divine declaration, which agrees not exactly with their own notions of truth and rectitude; and this they have attempted by no other means, than by abſurd explanations, or by bold aſſertions that they are not there, in direct contradiction to the ſenſe of language, and the whole tenour of thoſe writings; as ſome philoſophers have ventured, in oppoſition to all men's ſenſes, and even to their own, to deny the exiſtence of matter, for no other reaſon, but becauſe they find in it properties which they are unable to account for. Thus they have reduced Chriſtianity to a mere ſyſtem of ethics, and retain no part of it but the moral, which in fact is no characteriſtic part of it at all, as this, though in a manner leſs perfect, makes a part of every religion which ever appeared in the world. This ingenious method of converting Chriſtianity into Deiſm, cannot fail of acquiring many reſpectable

reſpectable proſelytes; for every virtuous and pious man, who would be a Chriſtian if he could, that is, who reverences the name of Chriſtianity, but cannot aſſent to its tenets, is glad to liſt under the ſtandard of any leader, who can teach him to be a Chriſtian, without believing any one principle of that inſtitution.

Whoever will look back into the theological annals of this country, will find, that during the laſt century, the faſhionable philoſophers were for the moſt part Atheiſts, who aſcribed every thing to chance, fate, or neceſſity; excluſive of all intelligence or deſign: theſe mighty giants, who fought againſt Heaven, being at length overthrown by the abſurdity of their own principles, and the ſuperior abilities of their adverſaries, retreated, about the beginning of the preſent, to the more tenable fort of Deiſm; but here again, being frequently worſted, they at laſt took ſhelter under the covert-way of rational Chriſtianity, where they now make their ſtand, and attack revelation with leſs odium,

and more ſucceſs, than from the open plains of profeſſed Deiſm, becauſe many are ready to reject the whole ſubſtance of the Chriſtian inſtitution, who would be ſhocked at the thought of relinquiſhing the name.

If Chriſtianity is to be learned out of the New Teſtament, and words have any meaning affixed to them, the fundamental principles of it are theſe—That mankind come into this world in a depraved and fallen condition;—that they are placed here for a while, to give them an opportunity to work out their ſalvation, that is, by a virtuous and pious life to purge off this guilt and depravity, and recover their loſt ſtate of happineſs and innocence, in a future life;—that this they are unable to perform, without the grace and aſſiſtance of God;—and that after their beſt endeavours, they cannot hope for pardon from their own merits, but only from the merits of Chriſt, and the atonement made for their tranſgreſſions by his ſufferings and death. This is clearly the ſum and ſubſtance of the Chriſtian diſpenſation;

and

and ſo adverſe is it to all the principles of human reaſon, that, if brought before her tribunal, it muſt inevitably be condemned. If we give no credit to its divine authority, any attempt to reconcile them is uſeleſs; and, if we believe it, preſumptuous in the higheſt degree. To prove the reaſonableneſs of a revelation, is in fact to deſtroy it; becauſe a revelation implies information of ſomething which reaſon cannot diſcover, and therefore muſt be different from its deductions, or it would be no revelation. If God had told us, that we come into this world in a ſtate of perfect innocence, void of all propenſities to evil; that our depravity proceeds entirely from the abuſe of that free-will, with which he has been pleaſed to endue us; that, if in this life we purſue a virtuous conduct, we have a right to be rewarded, and if a vicious, we may expect to be puniſhed in another, except we prevent it by repentance and reformation, and that theſe are always in our own power—if God had informed us of nothing more, this would

have been no revelation, becauſe it is juſt what our reaſon, properly employed, might have taught us; but if he has thought proper, by ſupernatural means, to aſſure us, that our ſituation, our relations, our depravity, our merits, and our powers, are all of a kind extremely different from what we imagine; and that his diſpenſations towards us are founded on principles which cannot be explained to us, becauſe, in our preſent ſtate, we are unable to comprehend them; this is a revelation, which we may believe, or not, according to our opinion of its authority; but let us not reaſon it into no revelation at all.

The writers of the New Teſtament frequently declare, that the religion, which they teach, is a myſtery, that is, a revelation of the diſpenſations of God to mankind, which without ſupernatural information we never could have diſcovered; thus St. Paul ſays, "Having made known to us the myſtery of "his will." What then is this myſtery? not the moral precepts of the goſpel; for they are no more a myſtery than the ethics of Ariſtotle,

Ariſtotle, or the Offices of Cicero: the myſtery conſiſts alone in theſe very doctrines which the Rationaliſt explodes, becauſe they diſagree with the concluſions of his reaſon; that is, becauſe they are myſteries, as they are avowed to be by thoſe who taught them.

But theſe bold advocates for reaſon, underſtand not its extent, its powers, or the proper application of them. The utmoſt perfection of human reaſon, is the knowledge of its own defects, and the limits of its own confined powers, which are extremely narrow. It is a lamp which ſerves us very well for the common occupations of life, which are near at hand, but can ſhew us no proſpect at a diſtance: on all ſpeculative ſubjects, it is exceedingly fallacious, but in none ſo frequently miſleads us, as in our religious and political inquiries; becauſe, in the former, we draw concluſions without premiſes; and in the latter, upon falſe ones. Thus, for inſtance, reaſon tells us, that a Creator, infinitely powerful and good, could never

never permit any evil, natural or moral, to have a place in his works; becauſe his goodneſs muſt induce him, and his power enable him, to exclude them: this argument is unanſwerable by any thing but experience, which every hour confutes it. Thus again, reaſon aſſures us, that ſufferings, though they may be juſt puniſhments for paſt crimes, and a means to prevent them for the future, can never be compenſations for them; much leſs can the ſufferings of one being atone for the guilt of another: againſt this no objection can be urged, except the belief of mankind, in all ages and nations, and the expreſs declarations of revelation; which unanimouſly contradict it, and afford ſufficient grounds for our concurrence. In theſe two inſtances we are deceived by miſapplying our reaſon to ſubjects in which we have no premiſes to reaſon upon; for, being totally ignorant on what plan the univerſal ſyſtem is formed and ſupported, we can be no judges of what is good or evil with regard to the whole; and, as we know not for

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what ends either guilt or ſufferings were ever admitted, we muſt be unable to comprehend what connections between them may poſſibly be derived from thoſe ends. In our political diſcuſſions, reaſon equally miſleads us; in theſe, ſhe preſents us with ſchemes of government, in which, by the moſt admirable contrivances, juſtice is ſo impartially adminiſtered, property ſo well guarded, and liberty ſo effectually ſecured, that in theory it ſeems impoſſible, that any people under ſuch wiſe regulations can poſſibly fail of being happy, virtuous, and free; but experiment ſoon convinces us, that they are inadequate to theſe ſalutary purpoſes, and that, in practice, they are productive only of anarchy and confuſion. Here our errors ariſe from reaſoning on falſe premiſes, that is, from ſuppoſing that mankind will act on principles incompatible with the vices, the follies, and the paſſions of human nature. If reaſon, therefore, is ſo fallible a judge in the little and low concerns of human policy, with which ſhe is daily converſant, how abſurd

ſurd is the Rationaliſt, who conſtitutes her ſole arbiter in the diſcuſſions of the moſt ſublime ſubjects, of which ſhe has not the leaſt comprehenſion, the attributes and diſpenſations of the Almighty, our relations to him, and our connections with paſt and future ſtates of exiſtence!

Of all men, who are called Chriſtians, the Rationaliſt ſeems to have the leaſt pretence to that denomination: the Church of England acknowledges the belief of all the doctrines of this inſtitution in her articles, though in them they are ill explained, and worſe expreſſed; the Church of Rome aſſents to them all, but adds many without ſufficient authority; the Calviniſt denies them not, but diſgraces them by harſh, obſcure, and abſurd comments; the Quaker admits them, but is bewildered by enthuſiaſtic notions of partial inſpirations; and the Methodiſt ſubſcribes to them all with the utmoſt veneration, but (inconſiſtently) depreciates the merit of moral duties, at the ſame time that he inſiſts on the practice of the

the moſt rigid; but the Rationaliſt reprobates the whole, as impious, ridiculous, and contradictory to the juſtice of God, and the reaſon of man. Nor is he leſs adverſe to the ſpirit, than to the letter of this religion: the true Chriſtian is humble, teachable, and diffident; the Rationaliſt is aſſuming, obſtinate, and ſelf-ſufficient: the Chriſtian hopeth all things, feareth all things, and believeth all things; the Rationaliſt hopeth for nothing, but from his own merits, feareth nothing from his own depravity, and believeth nothing, the grounds of which he cannot perfectly underſtand. Why them muſt he be a Chriſtian? no man is now compelled to come in, nor more obliged to be a Chriſtian, than a Free-maſon; the belief of it is not neceſſary to his advancement in life, nor his progreſs in any profeſſion; we know that he may be a lawyer, a phyſician, or even a divine, without it. If, on an impartial enquiry, he is a religious and moral Deiſt, why not own it? Such were Socrates, Plato, and Cicero; and it is ſtill a character by no means

means diſgraceful to a virtuous man. I blame no one for want of faith, but for want of ſincerity; not for being no Chriſtian, but for pretending to be one, without believing. The profeſſed Deiſt gives Chriſtianity fair play; if ſhe cannot defend herſelf, let her fall; but the rational Chriſtian aſſaſſinates her in the dark: the firſt attacks Chriſt, as did the multitude, with ſwords and ſtaves; the latter, like Judas, betrays him with a kiſs.

DISQUISITION VII.

ON GOVERNMENT AND CIVIL LIBERTY.

IF any one caſts his eye on the title of this eſſay, ſhort as it is, he will ſcarcely be perſuaded to read any farther; as he will rationally conclude, that, on a ſubject ſo hackneyed by the beſt and worſt writers of all ages, from Ariſtotle to the newſpaper politicians of the preſent times, nothing can be added, which can afford either inſtruction or entertainment: but ſo many abſurd principles, concerning government and liberty, have of late been diſſeminated with unuſual induſtry; principles as falſe as miſchevious, as inconſiſtent with common ſenſe as with all human ſociety; that it ſeems neceſſary that they ſhould not paſs quite unnoticed, eſpecially as they require nothing more, than to be fairly ſtated, to be refuted. The moſt

conſiderable of them are the following; to each of which I ſhall ſay a few words.

1ſt. That all men are born equal.

2dly. That all men are born free.

3dly. That all government is derived from the people.

4thly. That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed.

5thly. That no government ought to laſt any longer than it continues to be of equal advantage to the two contracting parties, that is, to the governed, as to the governors.

Firſt then; That all men are born equal; by which propoſition, if it is only meant, that all men are equally born, that is, that one man is as much born as another, I ſhall not diſpute its truth: but in every other ſenſe it is entirely falſe; for we daily ſee, that ſome are born with beautiful and healthy bodies, and ſome with frames diſtorted, and filled with the moſt deplorable diſeaſes;

diſeaſes; ſome with minds fraught with the ſeeds of wiſdom and genius, others with thoſe of idiotiſm and madneſs; ſome, by the laws and conſtitution of their countries, are born to the inheritance of affluent fortunes and diſtinguiſhed honours, others to a life of poverty, labour, and obſcurity. How theſe can be ſaid to be born equal, I cannot comprehend. If by this propoſition is to be underſtood, that, at the time of their birth, all men are poſſeſſed of an equal ſhare of power, wealth, wiſdom, learning, and virtue; when they are equally incapable of poſſeſſing any; this would be no leſs ridiculous, than to aſſert, that all men are born with teeth of the ſame length, when none of them are born with any teeth at all. But, ſuppoſing they were all born equal; would this prove, what is always intended to be proved by it, that they ought always to continue ſo? or can any argument be drawn from thence, againſt their future inequality and ſubordination? muſt no man preſume to be ſix feet high, becauſe, perhaps, he was born of the ſame

ſize as another, who is now but four? muſt no man aſſume power over another, becauſe they were born equal, that is, becauſe at their birth they were both incapable of exerciſing any power whatever? Thus, we ſee, this mighty argument, drawn from the ſuppoſed natural equality of mankind, by which all powers and principalities are threatened to be overthrown, is entirely falſe, and if true, is nothing to the purpoſe for which it has been ſo often and ſo pompouſly introduced.

Secondly; That all men are born free. This is ſo far from being true, that the firſt infringement of this liberty is being born at all; which is impoſed upon them, without their conſent, given either by themſelves or their repreſentatives; and it may eaſily be ſhewn, that man, by the conſtitution of his nature, never ſubſiſts a free and independent being, from the firſt to the laſt moment of his reſidence on this terreſtrial globe: where, during the firſt nine months of his exiſtence, he is confined in a dark and ſultry priſon, debarred from light and air; till at length,

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by an Habeas Corpus brought by the hand of ſome kind deliverer, he is ſet at liberty: but what kind of liberty does he then enjoy? he is bound hand and foot, and fed upon bread and water, for as long a period; no ſooner is he unbound, than he makes ſo bad a uſe of his liberty, that it becomes neceſſary that he ſhould be placed in a ſtate of the ſevereſt diſcipline, firſt under a nurſe, and then a ſchoolmaſter, both equal tyrants in their ſeveral departments; by whom he is again confined without law, condemned without a jury, and whipt without mercy. In this ſtate of ſlavery he continues many years, and at the expiration of it, he is obliged to commence an involuntary ſubject of ſome civil government; to whoſe authority he muſt ſubmit, however ingeniouſly he may diſpute her right, or be juſtly hanged for diſobedience to her laws. And this is the ſum total of human liberty. Perhaps it may be ſaid, that all this may be ingenious ridicule, but cannot be intended for ſerious argument; to which I reply, that it is the moſt ſerious

argument that can be offered, becauſe it is derived from the works, and the will of our Creator; and evidently ſhews, that man was never deſigned by him to be an independent and ſelf-governed being, but to be trained up in a ſtate of ſubordination and government in the preſent life, to fit him for one more perfect in another: and, if it was not a reflection too ſerious, I ſhould add, that, in the numerous catalogue of human vices, there is not one which ſo completely diſqualifies him from being a member of that celeſtial community, as a factious and turbulent diſpoſition, and an impatience of controul; which frequently aſſumes the honourable title of the love of liberty.

Thirdly; That all government is derived from the people. This is another fallacious propoſition; which in one ſenſe is true, but, with regard to the principles ſo often eſtabliſhed upon it, entirely falſe. It is true, indeed, that all government is ſo far derived from the people, that there could be no government if there were no people to be governed;

verned: if there were no ſubjects there could be no kings, nor parliaments if there were no conſtituents, nor ſhepherds if there were no ſheep; but the inference uſually drawn from this propoſition is utterly falſe, which is, that, becauſe all government is derived from the people, the people have a right to reſume it, and adminiſter it themſelves, whenever they pleaſe. But whatever claim they may have to this right, the exerciſe of it is impracticable, from the very nature of government; for all government muſt conſiſt of the governors, and the governed; if the people at large are the governors, where ſhall we be able to find the governed? All government is power, with which ſome are intruſted, to controul the actions of others; but how is it poſſible that every man ſhould have a power to controul the actions of every man? this would be a form of government, which we have heard ſometimes recommended as the moſt perfect, in which all are governed by all; that is, in other words, where there is no government

at all. I agree with theſe pretended patriots, that the people in every country have a right to reſiſt manifeſt grievances and oppreſſions, to change their governors, and even their conſtitutions, on great and extraordinary occaſions; whenever they groan under the rod of tyranny, they have a right to ſhake it off, and form a conſtitution more productive of liberty; and, in like manner, if they find themſelves torn by irreconcileable factions, and debilitated by internal contentions, they have an equal right to change it for a government more arbitrary and deciſive. But we ſhall not agree ſo well in our definition of that important and miſapplied term 'the people;' by which I would be underſtood to mean the whole body of a nation, adviſed and directed by the moſt reſpectable members of it; who are poſſeſſed of rank, property, wiſdom, and experience: But who are thoſe in this country, whom our modern demagogues diſtinguiſh by this name, and veſt with this ſupreme dominion? Not the hereditary peers of the realm; not the repreſentatives

preſentatives of this very people in parliament aſſembled; not the paſtors of the church, the ſages of the law, or the magiſtrates who are guardians of the public ſafety; not the poſſeſſors of landed property, the opulent ſtockholder, or the wealthy merchant. Theſe are all repreſented as tools of miniſters, lovers of ſlavery, united in a conſpiracy to deſtroy their country and ruin themſelves: they point out to us no defenders of our liberties or properties, but thoſe who have themſelves neither; no public-ſpirit, but in the garrets of Grub-ſtreet; no reformation, but from the purlieus of St. Giles's; nor one Solon, or Lycurgus, but who is to emerge from the tin-mines of Cornwall, or the coal-pits of Newcaſtle. Theſe are not the people whom I ſhould chuſe to truſt with unlimited power, becauſe I know they are totally incapable of employing it to any ſalutary purpoſe, even for themſelves; and, whatever might be our grievances, redreſs from ſuch hands would be much more intolerable.

Fourthly;

Fourthly; That all government is a compact between the governors and the governed. This imaginary compact is repreſented by ſome, as a formal agreement entered into by the two contracting parties, by which the latter gives up part of their natural independence, in exchange for protection granted by the former; without which voluntary ſurrender, no one man, or body of men, could have a right to controul the actions of another; and ſome have gone ſo far as to aſſert, that this ſurrender cannot be made binding by repreſentation, that parents cannot conſent to it for their children, or nations for individuals, but that every one muſt give his perſonal concurrence, and that on this alone the conſtitution of every government is or ought to be founded: but all this is a ridiculous fiction, intended only to ſubvert all government, and let mankind looſe to prey upon each other; for in fact, no ſuch compact ever was propoſed or agreed to, no ſuch natural independence ever poſſeſſed, and conſequently can never have been given up.

up. We hear a great deal about the conſtitutions of different ſtates, by which are underſtood ſome particular modes of government, ſettled at ſome particular times, which ought to be ſupported with religious veneration through all ſucceeding ages: in ſome of theſe, the people are ſuppoſed to have a right to greater degrees of liberty than in others, having made better bargains for themſelves, and given up leſs of their natural independence: but this, and all concluſions drawn from theſe premiſes, muſt be falſe, becauſe the facts on which they are founded are not true; for no ſuch conſtitutions, eſtabliſhed on general conſent, are any where to be found; all which, we ſee, are the offſprings of force or fraud, of accident, and the circumſtances of the times, and muſt perpetually change with thoſe circumſtances: in all of them, the people have an equal right to preſerve or regain their liberty, whenever they are able. But the queſtion is not, what right they have to liberty; but, what degree of it they are capable of enjoying, without accompliſhing

compliſhing their own deſtruction. In ſome countries this is very ſmall, and in none can it be very great, becauſe the depravity of human nature will not permit it. Compact is repugnant to the very nature of government; whoſe eſſence is compulſion, and which originates always from neceſſity, and never from choice or compact; and it is the moſt egregious abſurdity, to reaſon from the ſuppoſed rights of mankind in an imaginary ſtate of nature, a ſtate the moſt unnatural, becauſe in ſuch a ſtate they never did or can ſubſiſt, or were ever deſigned for. The natural ſtate of man is by no means a ſtate of ſolitude and independence, but of ſociety and ſubordination; all he effects of human art are parts of his nature, becauſe the power of producing them is beſtowed upon him by the author of it. It is as natural for men to build cities, as for birds to build neſts; and to live under ſome kind of government, as for bees and ants; without which he can no more ſubſiſt than thoſe ſocial and induſtrious inſects; nor has he either more right, or

power,

power, than they, to refuſe his ſubmiſſion. But if every man was poſſeſſed of this natural independence, and had a right to ſurrender it on a bargain, he muſt have an equal right to retain it; then he has a right to chuſe, whether he will purchaſe protection at the price of freedom, or whether he prefers liberty and plunder to ſafety and conſtraint: a large majority of mankind, who have neither property nor principles, would undoubtedly make choice of the latter, and all theſe might rob, and murder, and commit all manner of crimes with impunity; for, if this their claim to natural independence is well founded, they could not be juſtly amenable to any tribunal upon earth, and thus the world would ſoon become a ſcene of univerſal rapine and bloodſhed. This ſhews into what abſurdities we run, whenever we reaſon from ſpeculative principles, without attending to practicability and experience: for the real truth is no more than this, Every man, by the conſtitution of human nature, comes into the world under ſuch a degree

a degree of authority and reſtraint as is neceſſary for the preſervation and happineſs of his ſpecies and himſelf; this is no more left to his choice, than whether he will come into the world, or not; and this obligation he carries about with him, ſo long as he continues in it. Hence he is bound to ſubmit to the laws and conſtitution of every country in which he reſides, and is juſtly puniſhable for diſobedience to them. To aſk a man whether he chuſes to be ſubject to any law or government, is to aſk him, whether he chuſes to be a man, or a wild beaſt, and wiſhes to be treated accordingly. So far are men from being poſſeſſed of this natural independence, on which ſo many ſyſtems of anarchy have been erected, that ſubmiſſion to authority is eſſential to humanity, and a principal condition on which it is beſtowed; man is evidently made for ſociety, and ſociety cannot ſubſiſt without government, and therefore government is as much a part of human nature, as a hand, a heart, or a head; all theſe are frequently applied to the worſt

of

of purpoſes, and ſo is government; but it would be ridiculous from thence to argue, that we ſhould live longer and happier without them. The Supreme Governor of the world has not determined who ſhall be his vicegerents, nor what forms of government ſhall be adopted; but he has unalterably decreed that there ſhall be ſome; and therefore, though no particular governors can lay claim to a divine right of ruling, yet government itſelf is of divine inſtitution, as much as eating, and for the ſame reaſon, becauſe we cannot ſubſiſt without it.

Fifthly; That no government ought to ſubſiſt any longer than it continues to be of equal advantage to the governed as to the governors. If this propoſition is adopted, and by advantage wealth and power are to be underſtood, there is an end of all government at once; for the greateſt ſhare of theſe muſt be poſſeſſed by the governors; becauſe without it they could not govern: power and property always accompany each other, and power is government; theſe, therefore,

ſtill continue to be, that only of who ſhall govern.

It is an old and a juſt obſervation, that the loudeſt advocates for liberty have always been the greateſt tyrants whenever they have got power into their hands: and this muſt neceſſarily be; becauſe a love of liberty is an impatience of controul, and, when this impatience of controul is united with power, reſiſtance is an infringement of their liberty who poſſeſs it, and is treated by them with ſeverity, in proportion to their impatience of controul; and thus the ſame diſpoſition, which in a ſubject conſtitutes a patriot, in a prince creates a tyrant. This ſhews, that an extraordinary zeal for liberty is nothing more than an extraordinary fondneſs for power, that is, a power to controul the actions of others, uncontrouled ourſelves; and this love of liberty does not ariſe ſo much from our fears of being ill-governed, as from our diſlike of being governed at all. So true is this, that I am fully perſuaded, that if an angel was ſent from heaven, veſted with irreſiſtible power,

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to govern any country upon earth, and was to execute his commiſſion with the utmoſt degree of wiſdom, juſtice, and benevolence, his dominions would very ſoon be deſerted by moſt of the inhabitants; who would rather chuſe to ſuffer mutual injuries and oppreſſions, however grievous, under any government in which they themſelves had a ſhare, than to be compelled to be virtuous and happy by any ſuperior authority whatever.

The uſual fallacy of which democratic writers avail themſelves, is this—they conſtantly charge all the numerous evils inherent in all human governments to the account of the governors; which for the moſt part are imputable with more propriety to the governed: it is owing to their vices that there is any ſuch thing as government, or any occaſion for it; and conſequently all its attendant evils muſt be derived from the ſame ſource. It is their crimes, which require puniſhment, and their venality which makes corruption neceſſary; war, with all its horrors, ſprings from their depravity, the vio-

lence of faction, the avarice of commerce, the ambition of the rich, and the profligacy and idleneſs of the poor: princes are made tyrants by the perverſeneſs and diſobedience of their ſubjects, and ſubjects become ſlaves from their incapacity to enjoy liberty. Every governor is in the ſituation of a gaoler, whoſe very office ariſes from the criminality of thoſe over whom he preſides; theſe ſometimes ſuffer much from the abuſe of his power; but they would ſuffer more from their mutual ill-uſage, if unreſtrained by his ſuperintendant authority. A vicious and corrupt people can never be free, becauſe they are obliged to take ſhelter under deſpotiſm, which alone can defend them from the oppreſſions and injuries which they would every hour inflict upon each other; and a virtuous people will never be ſlaves, becauſe they ſtand in need of no ſuch defence.

We cannot fall into a more common, or more pernicious error, than to imagine, that, becauſe liberty is our ſupreme bleſſing, we, for that reaſon, can never have too much:

if this was true, government would indeed be a grievance, and ought every where to be aboliſhed; but the bleſſings of liberty, like all others beſtowed upon mankind, are circumſcribed within certain bounds, and become misfortunes by exceſs: dominion is not allotted to the few, for their own, but for the benefit of the many over whom they rule, and no greater degree of power ſhould ever be truſted in the hands of man, than is requiſite for that end; but to ſo much every community muſt ſubmit for its own preſervation; and this is the only ſtandard by which a juſt proportion of liberty can be aſcertained. Every nation is by no means happy in proportion to the degree of freedom which it enjoys, but, as that degree is adapted to the circumſtances and the diſpoſitions of the people; and with them muſt frequently change. The ſame degree of power, which happily governs a ſmall, induſtrious, virtuous, and frugal ſtate, is totally unable to reſtrain the avarice, ambition, and faction of an extenſive, rich, and

luxurious empire: as the ſtill and cryſtal lake is quietly bounded by the flowery banks which ſurround it; whilſt the turbulent and tempeſtuous ocean can be confined only by tremendous rocks and aſpiring mountains. The greateſt degree of liberty, which any people can enjoy, is, to be governed by equitable and impartial laws; but theſe cannot be adminiſtered, but either by their voluntary ſubmiſſion, or by ſuperior force; if the firſt is refuſed, the latter muſt be exerted, and then liberty ſubſiſts no more: and hence it is evident, that thoſe who will not be contented with the greateſt degree of this invaluable bleſſing, muſt quickly find themſelves deprived of the leaſt; and that every people, who, from falſe and impracticable notions of liberty, refuſe to ſubmit to any government of their own, muſt very ſoon, from the conſtitution of human nature, be obliged to receive it under the yoke of ſome foreign power, which is wiſer, and therefore ſtronger, than themſelves.

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DISQUISITION VIII.

ON RELIGIOUS ESTABLISHMENTS.

THE zealous advocates for religious liberty, frequently attack us with this triumphant queſtion, What has government to do with men's religion? to which I anſwer, Nothing; provided men's religion had nothing to do with government: but our religious and political opinions and intereſts are ſo intimately connected, and ſo blended together, that it is impoſſible to divide them. Were religious controverſies relative to ſpeculative doctrines only, government would have neither right or inclination to interfere in them; but ſuch are by no means the objects of contention: theſe doctrines, believed by few, and underſtood by fewer, are nothing more than the ſignals of parties ſtruggling for ſuperiority, not for truth; for, as in civil conteſts men perſecute each other for

wearing ribands of different colours, ſo do they in religious, for profeſſing different opinions; not that they have any objections to the ribands, or the opinions, but becauſe both are the marks by which thoſe are diſtinguiſhed who are adverſe to their purſuits. Proteſtants never inſtitute ſevere penal laws againſt Papiſts becauſe they believe tranſubſtantiation, (for why ſhould they not believe it, if they can?) but, becauſe the profeſſion of that doctrine is the teſt, by which thoſe are known to be members of a church which would infringe their liberties, and devour a great part of their property; on the other hand, the Church of Rome does not perſecute Proteſtants becauſe they cannot aſſent to this doctrine, but, becauſe the diſavowal of it is the ſignal that they are deſirous to pull down that fabric of wealth and power, which they have erected for themſelves, and are unwilling to part with: opinions are held forth as marks of diſtinction, but ambition and intereſt are the real cauſes of the diſpute.

It

It will perhaps be ſaid, that, notwithſtanding this may be true, there are many, very many pious and honeſt perſons, who, on the ſtricteſt examination, and cleareſt conviction, have adopted opinions on religious ſubjects, of which they are laudably tenacious, and cannot relinquiſh without violating both their reaſon and their conſcience; and that of theſe, for which they are accountable to God alone, no government can have a right to take cognizance, much leſs to controul. To all this I readily agree, ſo long as they continue to be opinions only; but whenever they ſhoot up into actions, which is their natural proceſs, they then come within the line of human juriſdiction, and government is obliged to take notice of them, not from choice, but from neceſſity, and ſelf-preſervation; for every religious ſect holds principles more or leſs productive of arbitrary power, liberty, or anarchy, which muſt neceſſarily affect the civil conſtitutions under which they are profeſſed; as they are the moſt dangerous, as well as the moſt common

mon combuſtibles, which knavery employs to ſet folly and ignorance in a flame, whenever it may be ſubſervient to her intereſt. All religious ſects, however they may differ in other points, agree in one, which is the purſuit of power, and this by the ſame progreſſive ſteps—by firſt imploring toleration, next claiming equality, and then ſtruggling for ſuperiority over all the reſt. Government cannot remain an unconcerned ſpectator of theſe contentions, in which her own exiſtence is at ſtake, but muſt ſtretch out a pacific hand to compoſe them: this ſhe can effect by no other method, than by taking one, which ſhe moſt approves, under her protection, maintaining its miniſters, and forming her public worſhip agreeably to its doctrines; that is, in other words, by an eſtabliſhment: and thus we ſee, that ſome religious eſtabliſhment muſt neceſſarily make a part of every national conſtitution; which neceſſity proceeds not from any natural connection between religion and government, but, becauſe the artifice, ignorance, and ſuperſtition

perſtition of mankind never fails to unite them: and hence, I apprehend, ariſes that alliance between church and ſtate, which has been ſo much diſcuſſed, and ſo little underſtood.

The eſtabliſhment of one religion ought always to be accompanied by an unlimited toleration of all others, on the principles of both juſtice and policy; of juſtice, becauſe, although every government has a right to beſtow her protection and emoluments on any mode of religion which ſhe moſt approves, ſhe can have no right to enforce the belief or exerciſe of that, or to prohibit the profeſſion of any other, by compulſive penalties; of policy, becauſe ſuch a toleration is the moſt effectual means of putting an end to all religious diſſenſions, which ſpringing, for the moſt part, from a love of ſingularity and contradiction, thrive under perſecution, and, when they ceaſe to be oppoſed, they ceaſe to exiſt.

If ſome eſtabliſhment is thus neceſſary, ſo muſt be ſome teſts, or ſubſcriptions, by

which

which the friends of this eſtabliſhment may be diſtinguiſhed, and the principles of thoſe who are admitted into it aſcertained; without which it would be no eſtabliſhment at all: but every wiſe government will take care to make theſe as comprehenſive as the nature of their inſtitutions will admit, in order to leſſen the number of her enemies; for moſt aſſuredly ſuch will all be who are excluded. Whoever are enemies to the religious conſtitution of any country, whatever they may pretend, can never be friends to its civil; for it is impoſſible that an honeſt man, who believes his own religious profeſſion to be true, and moſt acceptable to his Creator, ſhould ever be cordially attached to a conſtitution which diſcourages the exerciſe of it, and patronizes another, which appears to him to be falſe and impious. Extend this comprehenſion as widely as poſſible, it will exclude many pious and worthy perſons, who are tenacious of different principles; and narrow it to any degree, it will ſtill admit all thoſe who have none: nor is it inexpedient

expedient that they ſhould be admitted; for every ſtate has a right to avail itſelf of their aſſiſtance, who, though they are not ſo good men, may be better ſubjects; as theſe may be induced by intereſt to ſupport the conſtitution of their country, while thoſe are compelled by principle to ſubvert it.

Thoſe who will not conform to any Chriſtian eſtabliſhment, give theſe reaſons for their diſſent;—that the religion ſo eſtabliſhed is imperfect, corrupted, and diſſimilar to the genuine purity of that holy inſtitution; and that they are in duty bound to reject ſuch a religion, and to ſearch for another, which appears to them to be more perfect and pure. The firſt of theſe reaſons is unhappily true, but no apology for their conduct; the latter, entirely a miſtake, and therefore ought not to be regarded.

Firſt then, the charge of imperfection and corruption may be made good againſt any eſtabliſhed religion that ever exiſted. It muſt be liable to many imperfections from its own nature, and the nature of man; in its

its original inſtitution, it muſt lean to the errors and prejudices of the times; and, how much ſoever it is then approved, it cannot long preſerve that approbation, becauſe, human ſcience being continually fluctuating, mankind grow more or leſs knowing in every generation, and conſequently muſt change their opinions on religious, as well as on all other ſubjects; ſo that, however wiſely any eſtabliſhed ſyſtem may be formed at firſt, it muſt, from the natural increaſe or decreaſe of human knowledge, be found or thought to be erroneous in the courſe of a few years: and yet the change of national religions cannot keep pace with the alterations of national opinions, becauſe ſuch frequent reviews and reformations would totally unhinge men's principles, and ſubvert the foundations of all religion and morality whatever. It muſt likewiſe be corrupted by the very eſtabliſhment which protects it, becauſe by that it will be mixed with the worldly purſuits of its degenerate votaries; and it muſt be extremely diſſimilar to its original purity, or it would

would be incapable of being eſtabliſhed; for pure and genuine Chriſtianity never was, nor ever can be the national religion of any country upon earth. It is a gold too refined to be worked up with any human inſtitution, without a large portion of alloy; for, no ſooner is this ſmall grain of muſtard-ſeed watered with the fertile ſhowers of civil emoluments, than it grows up into a large and ſpreading tree, under the ſhelter of whoſe branches the birds of prey and plunder will not fail to make for themſelves comfortable habitations, and thence deface its beauty, and deſtroy its fruits.

Theſe imputations on religious eſtabliſhments are certainly juſt, but no reaſons for diſſenſions, becauſe the inference which makes the latter propoſition is entirely a miſtake; for no man can be bound in duty to deſert a national religion, on account of defects congenial to its nature, nor to ſearch for perfection, which is no where to be found. Some religious eſtabliſhment is abſolutely neceſſary to the exiſtence of every ſtate;

ſtate; but it is not neceſſary that this ſhould be perfect, and free from all errors and corruption, nor even that it ſhould be ſo eſteemed by thoſe who conform to it: it is ſufficiently perfect for this purpoſe, if it contains nothing repugnant to the principles of ſound morality, and the doctrines of Chriſt. The maſs of the people in every country, being incapable of making any accurate enquiry into religious ſubjects, muſt have a religion ready made, or none at all; and in this, thoſe of ſuperior abilities may conſcientiouſly join, without impeding their further reſearches into the diſpenſations of Providence, and the duties of man. Great and numerous muſt be the inconveniences of any religious eſtabliſhment in the hands of men; but what would be the condition of any nation in which there was none? No uniform mode of public worſhip could there be adopted; no edifices built or repaired for the celebration of it, nor miniſters maintained to perform it, except at the will of an ignorant and diſcordant multitude, the majority of

of whom would chuſe rather to have neither worſhip, churches, or miniſters, than to incur the expences which muſt attend them. Every man, who had any ſenſe of religion, would make one for himſelf; from whence innumerable ſects would ſpring up, each of which would chuſe a miniſter for themſelves; who, being dependent for ſubſiſtence on the voluntary and precarious liberality of his congregation, muſt indulge their humours, ſubmit to their paſſions, participate of their vices, and learn of them what doctrines they would chuſe to be taught; and conſequently none but the moſt ignorant and illiterate would undertake ſo mean and beggarly an employment. A people thus left to the dominion of their own imaginations and paſſions, and the inſtructions of ſuch teachers, would ſplit into as many ſects and parties, diviſions and ſubdiviſions, as knavery and folly, artifice, abſurdity, and enthuſiaſm, can produce; each of which would be attacked with violence, and ſupported with obſtinacy by all the reſt. This evidently demon-

ſtrates, that ſome religious eſtabliſhment muſt be annexed to every civil government; the members of which are ſo far from being bound in duty to deſert it, becauſe it falls ſhort of their ideas of purity and perfection, that they are obliged by all the ties of benevolence and ſociety to conform to and ſupport it, unleſs it requires any conceſſions poſitively criminal.

Should it ſtill be inſiſted on, that every man is obliged to profeſs and exerciſe that religion which appears to him moſt conſonant to reaſon, and moſt acceptable to God, with which no government can have a right to meddle, or power to controul; in anſwer I ſhall only ſay, that all this is undoubtedly a miſtake, which ariſes from applying propoſitions to men, as members of national communities, which are applicable to them only as individuals. Mankind, ſo long as they reſide on this terreſtrial globe, ought always to be conſidered in a two-fold capacity; as individuals, and as members of ſociety; that is, as men, and as citizens: in which different

ſituations, ſo different are their relations and duties, that there is ſcarce a propoſition which we can affirm of them with truth in one, which is not falſe if applied to them in the other. It is by this miſapplication that the zealous advocates for unbounded liberty, civil and religious, deceive their followers, and ſometimes themſelves, and draw concluſions equally deſtructive of all government and religion. Thus, for inſtance, they aſſert that all men are by nature free, equal, and independent: this, when applied to men as a general ſpecies, is true; they then apply this aſſertion to men who are members of civil communities, to whom ſubordination is neceſſary, and obedience to their ſuperiors an indiſpenſable duty, and therefore in regard to whom it is abſolutely falſe; and yet from hence they endeavour to prove, that government is an infringement of the natural rights of mankind. In like manner they affirm, that every man is obliged to make choice of that religion, and to adhere to that mode of worſhip, which appear to

his judgment to be the pureſt, and moſt acceptable to his Creator: this propoſition, likewiſe, with regard to men conſidered as individuals, is true; but this again they apply to members of national communities, and eſtabliſhed churches: with regard to whom it is not true; for, as ſuch, they are bound in duty to profeſs that religion, and practiſe that mode of worſhip, which the laws of that community enjoin, provided they find nothing in them poſitively evil: yet from hence they would perſuade us, that every individual has a right to deſert, or even to oppoſe, the eſtabliſhed religion of his country, whenever he finds, or fancies he can find a better. Thus are their unwary admirers deceived: the truth of theſe propoſitions they cannot deny, and have not perhaps ſagacity ſufficient to diſcover their miſapplication.

It is remarkable, that Chriſtianity conſtantly addreſſes us as men, never as citizens; the only duty it requires of us under that character, is ſubmiſſion to power in general,

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but preſcribes no rules for our political conduct: all thoſe divine precepts of patience, meekneſs, long-ſuffering, non-reſiſtance of evil, contempt of the world, and indifference to the things of it, are given us as individuals, but not as members of national communities; becauſe in that character they would have been impracticable: for no ſtate can adminiſter her internal policy, and much leſs regulate her conduct with regard to foreign powers, in conformity to theſe commands; becauſe the imperfections, the paſſions, and the vices of mankind, will not permit it. Any one as an individual may pay obedience to them; to thoſe who have little to do with the buſy occupations of the world, it is an eaſy and a pleaſing taſk; for thoſe who are deeply and earneſtly engaged in the moſt innocent of them, it is extremely difficult; but for thoſe who are employed in the great concerns of political communities, in carrying on war, negociating peace, and managing the intrigues of contending factions, it is abſolutely impracticable. This I take

take to be the cauſe of thoſe frequent declarations from the Author of this religion, that neither himſelf nor his doctrines are of this world; but adverſe to all its purſuits: and this perhaps may be the reaſon of that aſſertion, that it is eaſier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God; becauſe, rich men being uſually moſt engaged in theſe purſuits, moſt attached to the world, and moſt involved in the buſineſs of it, the extreme difficulty of their admiſſion is thus forcibly expreſſed: or, if by a rich man, is here meant a great man, that is, a conqueror, a hero, or a ſtateſman, this declaration may perhaps be literally true; and that it ſhould in this place be ſo underſtood, ſeems no improbable conjecture, as a rich man, and a great man, in moſt languages are ſynonymous terms. The firſt Chriſtians ſaw their religion in this light, and refuſed to have any concern with government, unleſs to obey it; they inquired not into the rights of thoſe who ruled, nor their own to liberty, and wiſhed

wiſhed for nothing, but to paſs through this life unincumbered with its buſineſs, and well prepared for a better: ſo long as they were a ſmall ſect, diſſenting from the religions of the countries in which they lived, this inoffenſive conduct was eaſily preſerved; but, when princes and nobles adopted their religion, and by ſuch illuſtrious examples it became almoſt univerſal, theſe principles or inactivity were no longer tenable, without the total diſſolution of all government; for, if no man would govern, there could be none: neceſſity therefore obliged them to take a part; a part ſoon awakened ambition, and love of power, thoſe paſſions ſo natural to the human heart, and induced them to ſeize the whole; Chriſtianity was eſtabliſhed, in conſequence corrupted, and little more of it remained, except the name.

To this opinion of the incompatibility of Chriſtianity with the occupations and cuſtoms of the world, were all thoſe numerous monaſtic inſtitutions, which every where accompanied its progreſs, indebted for their origin;

origin; inſtitutions certainly favourable to the genuine ſpirit of that religion, but, like the religion itſelf, ſo adverſe to the nature of man, that they can never be made fit for general uſe: could they have been confined to thoſe few, who are capable of employing ſolitude in devotion and religious contemplation, they would undoubtedly have been conducive to the practice of every Chriſtian virtue; but, as all were indiſcriminately admitted, who pretended to ſanctity, or who miſtook enthuſiaſm for piety, and a quarrel with the world for the love of God, they could not fail very ſoon to become nothing better than retreats for lazineſs, and ſeminaries of ſuperſtition and vice: yet, notwithſtanding all their abuſes, I am inclined to think there are ſtill within their walls ſome few inſtances of patience and reſignation, devotion and charity, carried to a higher degree of perfection than they are or can be in any other ſituation, in which the faſhions, the pleaſures, and buſineſs of life, and the corruptions of national eſtabliſhments, muſt more

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or leſs obſtruct their progreſs; where our virtue muſt be endangered by continual temptations, our meditations diverted from celeſtial objects by worldly purſuits; our devotions interrupted by amuſements and impertinence; and that ſerene chearfulneſs and happy complacency, ſo eſſential to the Chriſtian profeſſion, muſt frequently be diſturbed by injuries and diſappointments. The voluntary hardſhips which many of theſe recluſes impoſed upon themſelves, were probably derived from a miſtaken notion, that ſuffering was an eſſential part of their religion; a notion which they had perhaps contracted from that conſtant connection between them, which they had ſo long obſerved and felt during their perſecutions, and were not able ſuddenly to abandon, in happier and more indulgent times.

But why then eſtabliſh a religion, which is ſo improper for the purpoſe? Becauſe it is leſs improper than any other. The eſtabliſhment of ſome religion is neceſſary to the exiſtence of every ſtate, and it is as ne-

ceſſary that this ſhould be, or be thought, a revelation from God. Mere Deiſm never was, or can be, the eſtabliſhed religion of any country; for, as all its principles muſt be derived from the reaſon of ſome, they will always be controverted by the reaſon of others, and can therefore never obtain a general acquieſcence. The philoſopher, by learned inveſtigations, and the force of his own underſtanding, may be convinced of the great truths of natural religion; but, without the ſanction of ſupernatural authority, he will never be able to convince others, who will neither believe his doctrines, or obey his precepts. If Chriſtianity, therefore, is not adopted, ſome fabulous ſyſtem muſt ſupply its place; and, if ſome eſtabliſhed religion there muſt be, it is ſurely more eligible to make a true than a fictitious revelation the baſis of it. Nor will any one, I ſuppoſe, aſſert, that it would be preferable to eſtabliſh Paganiſm or Mahometiſm, and lay Chriſtianity by for private uſe; which, disfigured as it is by worldly connections, is

ſtill ſuperior to all other inſtitutions. As members therefore of political communities, we are bound to accept it with all its imperfections; though, as individuals, we ought always to approach as near to its original purity, as our own imperfections will permit.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.